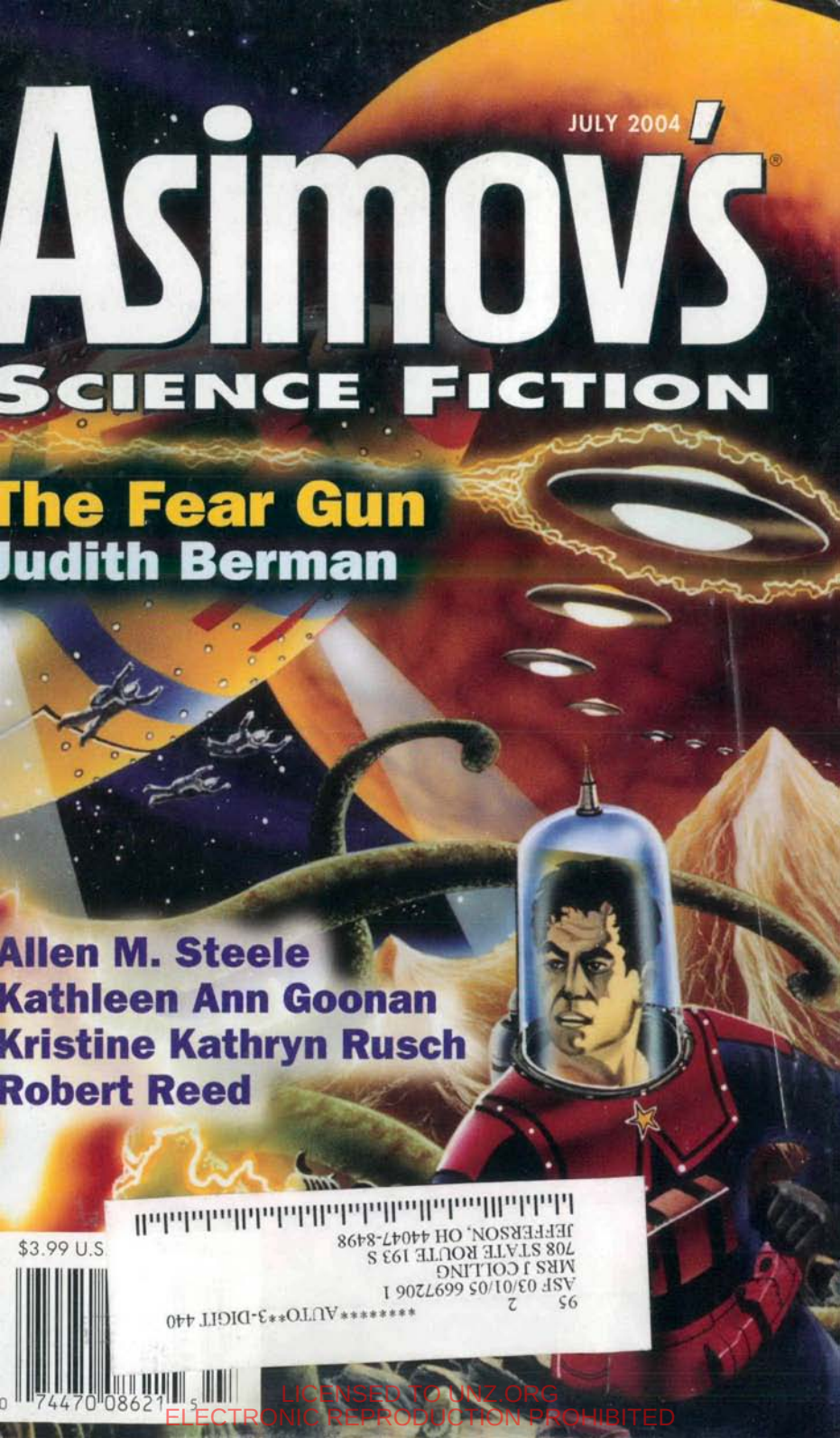
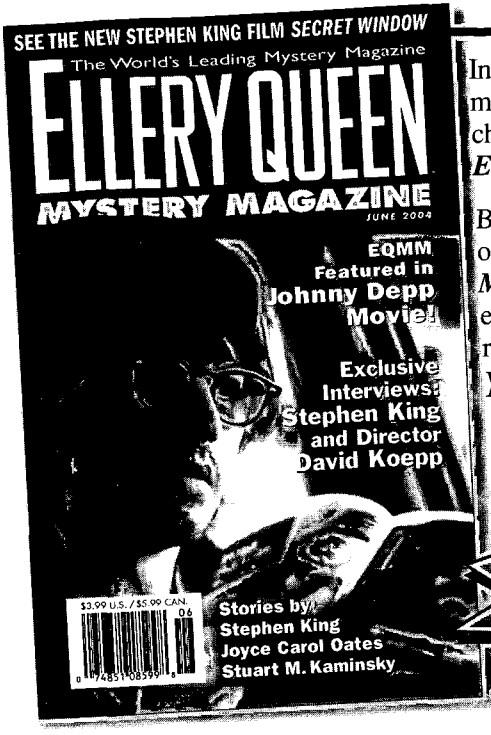


********AUTO**3-DIGIT 440
ASP 03/01/05 6697206 1
MRS J COLLING
708 STATE ROUTE 193 S
JEFFERSON, OH 44047-8498

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Meet the star of the new Stephen King movie **Secret Window**– ***Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine!***


SEE THE NEW STEPHEN KING FILM SECRET WINDOW
The World's Leading Mystery Magazine
ELLERY QUEEN
MYSTERY MAGAZINE
JUNE 2004
EQMM Featured in Johnny Depp Movie!
Exclusive Interviews: Stephen King and Director David Koepp
$3.99 U.S. / $5.99 CAN.
Stories by: Stephen King Joyce Carol Oates Stuart M. Kaminsky

In the blockbuster Stephen King movie ***Secret Window***, Johnny Depp's character would ***kill*** for a copy of ***Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine***.

But you don't have to! Order your own subscription to ***Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*** today and get each spine-tingling issue delivered right to your door for just $21.95. ***YOU SAVE 50%!***

"It's just the best mystery magazine in the world, bar none." –Stephen King

To subscribe, just fill out the order form below or charge your order by calling TOLL FREE 1-800-220-7443 (9am-5pm, EST.) *Orders only please!*

☑ ***YES!*** Enter my subscription to ***Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*** as indicated below. ***I save 50% off the regular price!***

❑ **1 year (12 issues) $21.95**

❑ **2 years (24 issues) $43.90**

❑ My payment is enclosed (U.S.funds)

❑ Bill me

MAIL TO:

ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE
Suite S, 6 Prowitt St.,
Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

Name _____
(Please Print)

Address _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of first issue. * We publish 2 double issues per year which count as 4 issues towards your subscription. Canadian and foreign orders add $5 per year. CT Residents: Add 6% state sales tax to your total order. Offer expires 9/30/05.

44C-NZEQLL

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW FROM ASPECT

ASPECT'S 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY!

"heaven is terrifyingly good, profound, and brave."*

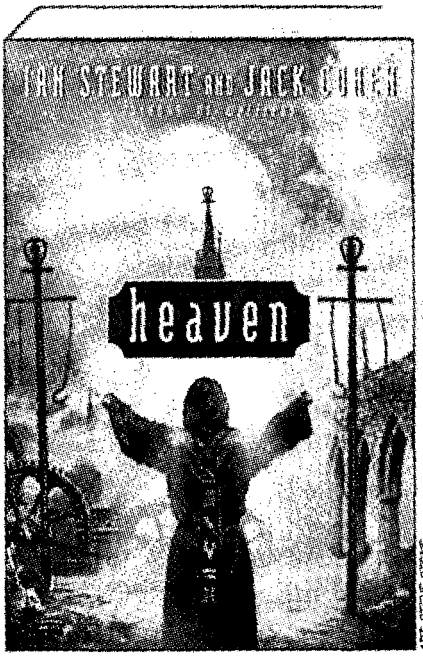
All Second-Best Sailor wants is to sail his boat—until the Cosmic Unity mission fleet targets for his homeworld. All Servant-of-Unity XIV Samuel wants is to help spread universal harmony to a grateful galaxy. Flung together by fate, the two now find themselves in a battle for the hearts and minds of every sentient creature in the galaxy.

"A cracking page-turner packed with great characters, spectacular incident, marvelous ideas, and some of the best-conceived aliens I've ever come across."

—*Stephen Baxter, author of *Coalescent*

"Fascinating and original aliens, compelling religions and far-out technologies—Stewart and Cohen probe horizons and push limits."

—David Brin, author of *Kiln People*



ART: STEVE STONE

AVAILABLE IN HARDCOVER

ASPECT

WHERE IMAGINATION KNOWS NO BOUNDS

Time Warner Book Group

Read an Excerpt Online at www.twbookmark.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Asimov's® Science Fiction

Vol. 28 No. 7
(Whole Number 342)

Next Issue on Sale June 29, 2004

Cover Art by Jean-Pierre Normand

Novella

16 Shady Grove . . . . . Allen M. Steele

Novelette

98 The Fear Gun . . . . . Judith Berman

Short Stories

48 Dinosaur Songs . . . . . Kathleen Ann Goonan
56 Daily Reports . . . . . Robert Reed
68 Forest for the Trees . . . . . Kristine Kathryn Rusch
86 Gwendolyn Is Happy to Serve You . . . . . Eliot Fintushel

Poetry

15 Dark Gourmet . . . . . Bruce Boston
67 The Rape of the Toyota . . . . . Cathy Tacinelli

Departments

4 Reflections: Toward a Theory of Story: Three . . . . . Robert Silverberg
10 On the Net: FTL . . . . . James Patrick Kelly
131 On Books . . . . . Paul Di Filippo
142 The SF Conventional Calendar . . . . . Erwin S. Strauss

Asimov's Science Fiction. ISSN 1065-2698. Vol. 28, No. 7. Whole No. 342, July 2004. GST #R123293128. Published monthly except for two combined double issues in April/May and October/November by Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications. One year subscription $43.90 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $53.90 (GST included in Canada), payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscription and all other correspondence about them, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Address for all editorial matters: *Asimov's Science Fiction,* 475 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016. *Asimov's Science Fiction* is the registered trademark of Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications.

© 2004 by Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications, 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855. Dell is a trademark registered in the U.S. Patent Office. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

Periodical postage paid at Norwalk, CT and additional mailing offices. Canadian postage paid at Montreal, Quebec, Canada Post International Publications Mail, Product Sales Agreement No. 40012460. POSTMASTER, send change of address to *Asimov's Science Fiction,* 6 Prowitt Street, Norwalk, CT 06855. In Canada return to Transcontinental Sub Dept, 525 Louis Pasteur, Boucherville, Quebec, J4B 8E7.

Printed in CANADA

PRINTED WITH SOY INK

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AN EPIC MILITARY SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL
THAT CROSSES TIME AND SPACE

RED STARS

by Gregg Bradley

The Remin Empire stood for eons, but now it is on the run from its archenemy, an alliance of the evil Drutid Empire and the reptilian Sarkallon. In a desperate attempt to save the Remin culture, along with the last of its citizens, the Remin survivors make a daring decision: They will jump their ships through the Unknown warp gate to a destination in the galaxy they cannot even guess, destroying the gate after they are through.

Jump ahead 473 years. The place: Earth's solar system. The year: A.D. 3022. An ancient starship is found in an asteroid. Inadvertently, a signal is sent – a Remin-style signal that reaches both the Remin and their enemy, who both decide to investigate. Will this be a final suicidal clash of empires, with Earth caught in the middle – an Earth having its own problems with civil war, weak leadership, and outside marauders? Or can a civilization-saving alliance be formed? And does the Remin link to human civilization go back in time further than anyone, even the Remin, can imagine?

Order from:

Dorrance Publishing Company, Pittsburgh, PA 15222
356 page paperback, 6" x 9" – $21.00
ISBN-0-8059-6343-X

To order, go to website: **www.dorrancebookstore.com**
OR call sales at **1-800-788-7654**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REFLECTIONS

by Robert Silverberg

TOWARD A THEORY OF STORY: III
THE STORYTELLER AS SHAMAN

I've devoted the past two columns to exploring my notion that the basic plot structure of all stories, whether they be the Foundation tales of Isaac Asimov or the short stories of James Joyce or the novels of Leo Tolstoy, has its roots in primordial human ritual. That basic plot skeleton, let me remind you once again, is this:

A sympathetic and engaging character (or an unsympathetic one who is engaging nevertheless), faced with some immensely difficult problem that it is necessary for him to solve, makes a series of attempts to overcome that problem, frequently encountering challenging sub-problems and undergoing considerable hardship and anguish, and eventually, at the darkest moment of all, calls on some insight that was not accessible to him at the beginning of the story and either succeeds in his efforts or fails in a dramatically interesting and revelatory way, thereby arriving at new knowledge of some significant kind.

Last time I traced the history of that narrative formulation back through the tragic plays of such Greek playwrights as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides to its origin in the early Greek festivals in honor of Dionysus, when poems and choral hymns were publicly recited in praise of that god, and then farther back yet into the wildly orgiastic rites through which the early Greeks paid homage to Dionysus in the days before their rulers shrewdly co-opted such fervor into formal public festivals.

Today we think of Dionysus, if we think of him at all, as the Greek god of wine and drunkenness. (From the fifth century B.C. onward the Greeks sometimes called him "Bacchus," which was the name by which the Romans knew him. We still use the term *bacchanalia* for any grand, convivial orgy of drinking.) But in ancient times he was also the god of fertility, who brought fruitfulness to mankind. His emblem was the phallus; the animals that symbolized him were forceful, passionate ones such as the bull, the panther, the lion, and the goat. Though new life of all kinds was his responsibility, it was the productivity of nature, the fertility of the fields, that was his special province. He brought the warmth and sunlight of springtime that produced the bounty of the new year's crops.

Agriculture goes back ten or twelve thousand years. From its earliest days farmers have paid close and uneasy heed to the changing seasons, watching the days grow shorter in autumn, waiting out the dark months of winter, rejoicing when sunlight and warmth return in the spring. The proper fulfillment of that cycle—coupled with the annual seasonal fluctuations in rainfall patterns—was vi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Asimov's®
Science Fiction

Isaac Asimov
Editorial Director (1977-1992)

GARDNER DOZOIS
Editor

SHEILA WILLIAMS
Executive Editor

BRIAN BIENIOWSKI
Assistant Editor

TREVOR QUACHRI
Technical Assistant

MARY GRANT
Editorial Assistant

VICTORIA GREEN
Senior Art Director

JUNE LEVINE
Associate Art Director

CAROLE DIXON
Senior Production Manager

ABIGAIL BROWNING
Manager Subsidiary Rights and Marketing

SCOTT LAIS
Contracts & Permissions

JULIA McEVOY
Manager, Advertising Sales

BRUCE W. SHERBOW
Vice President of Sales and Marketing

SANDY MARLOWE
Circulation Services

PETER KANTER
Publisher

CHRISTINE BEGLEY
Associate Publisher

SUSAN KENDRIOSKI
Executive Director, Art and Production

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE
CONNIE GOON
Advertising Sales Coordinator
Tel: (212) 686-7188
Fax: (212) 686-7414
(Display and Classified Advertising)

Stories from *Asimov's* have won 40 Hugos and 24 Nebula Awards, and our editors have received 16 Hugo Awards for Best Editor. *Asimov's* was also the 2001 recipient of the Locus Award for Best Magazine.

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. Please write "manuscript guidelines" in the bottom left-hand corner of the outside envelope. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *Asimov's Science Fiction*, 475 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tal to the survival of the agricultural society. An unnaturally chilly spring or a shortfall in rain would lead inevitably to famine, disease, and strife. Small wonder, then, that our ancestors devised rituals to insure the return of the spring, and invented myths to make the meaning of those rituals more vivid for themselves.

The myth of the god who dies and is resurrected provides a metaphorical structure for the annual cycle in which the happy harvest season of autumn is followed by the bleakness of winter and then the joy of the new springtime. Dionysus, in the earliest Dionysiac tales, was just such a resurrected god: the Vegetation Spirit who is torn apart, his body scattered, as the old year dies, and who is magically reborn in the spring after the community has been initiated into his rites. We see him, too, in other cultures under other names: Osiris, Adonis, Attis, Tammuz, Mithra, and many more. Vestiges of those ancient cults can be seen in Christianity, which gives us the divine figure of Jesus, born at the winter solstice (the time of year when the sun begins its long return after dwindling all through the autumn) as the redeemer of the world, put to death in springtime, resurrected immediately afterward.

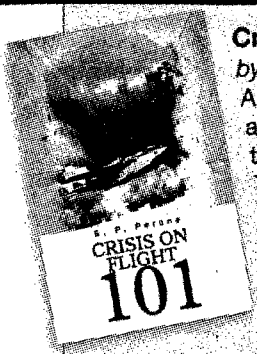
There is a structure here. Mankind, dependent on its crops for survival, is faced with the terrible challenge of summer's end, the diminishing sunlight, the cooler days. It is as though the god who brings fruitfulness to the world is dying. And the god *does* die; but even death can be conquered through struggle, the god will be reborn in the spring, the good golden sun will shine forth once more. It is not at all surprising that people everywhere would invent rituals and myths dealing with the defeat of death and the renewal of fertility. Those are the big subjects, after all: birth, survival, death. Rituals evolved in which symbolic figures—scapegoats—were chosen by the community to suffer in its name, to be driven out or even to die, taking with them the sins of the old year, so the slate was wiped clean and a glorious new year of rebirth and growth could follow. Oedipus and Orestes, the parent-killers, have through no fault of their own brought pollution to their cities. Prometheus, the fire-bringer, has stubbornly defied his fellow gods. Pentheus, the king who denies the supremacy of Dionysus and thus threatens the renewal of fertility, is torn apart. The sufferings of these and the other tragic figures of Greek drama are decreed by the gods, often (so it seems to us) unjustly; but they are necessary aspects of the ritual, for out of their suffering will come the new life of spring.

Hence the "catharsis" of which Aristotle speaks, the purging of pity and fear by witnessing these fundamentally religious dramas. What a properly constructed Greek play—or a properly constructed primitive ritual—provides is the sense that the universe is coherent and rational. We may not clearly understand its great mysteries—love, birth, strife, death, the great constants underlying our existence—but we learn, through public ceremonies, that those things are not devoid of rationale, that there is a meaning to the cycles of life, that birth leads inevitably to death but that death is not the end, for rebirth will come.

Throughout the world, then, stories were told and retold that of-

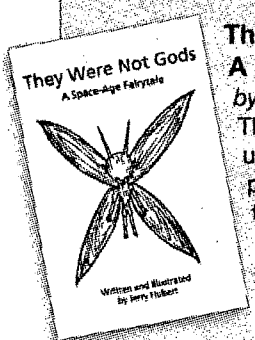
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If you think you know your place in the universe ... *Think again.*



Crisis on Flight 101
by S. P. Perone
A gripping, thought-provoking story of science and politics gone mad. When their research for the CIA produces an unexpected twist in time, Tony Shane and Andrea Martin are propelled aboard a 1939 overnight "flying boat" to England, and find themselves battling a mysterious time traveler threatening the outcome of World War II.

Shaturanga
by Brian Snelson
A great cataclysm has created a new ice age. An ancient prophecy is about to unfold. Follow Assha and her reluctant Guardian Knight on a death-defying chase across what was once Earth's ocean floor—into the heart of a mysterious kingdom, where the ultimate death machine awaits her unborn child.



They Were Not Gods
A Space-Age Fairytale
by Jerry Hubert
This is a story about space travel and the universal definition of humanity. Follow the paths of Paleface, Cros, and Thundercloud—three beings not so different from us—in this science fiction novel drawing from the spirit of the Gospels, *Frankenstein,* and the "ancient astronauts" theories of Erich von Däniken.

Available wherever fine books are sold and at www.iuniverse.com.

iUniverse™
The better choice in publishing.

Learn more about our Editor's Choice books and publishing programs at iuniverse.com or call 800-525-6435.

© 2004 iUniverse, Inc. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fered the comforting assurance that there was a logic to existence. The stories took many forms, of course. Some were explicitly resurrectionist—a god suffers, dies, and is reborn—but that wasn't the only way the story of springtime could be told. The Greeks themselves had a second version of the seasonal myth: the goddess Persephone is carried off by Pluto to the Underworld to be his bride, but her mother Demeter, goddess of grain, withholds the bounty of the harvest from mankind until Zeus must command Pluto to release Persephone for two thirds of the year, taking her back underground only in the winter months. Dozens of other metaphors for resurrection, less explicit than these, were devised. In all cases, though, what was being depicted was, essentially, *transformation*: the dramatization of a conflict that led to change of some sort—of an individual's character, of a family's way of life, of a community, even of the universe itself. And that's what fiction is still about: conflict and transformation.

Joseph Campbell, in his classic book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* showed how *all* tales of heroic struggle fulfill the terms of what he called the "monomyth," the basic story of stories: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." Concealed beneath this tale of adventure lies the assurance that spring will return. It's a structural formula at least as old as the Gilgamesh epic of Sumer; but you'll find it in *The Lord of the Rings* as well, in *Dune,* in *Foundation,* and, in one disguised form or another, in any story or novel you read today.

Thus the annual cycle of the seasons provides a structural explanation for the familiar problem/struggle/resolution pattern of all fictional narrative. Sacred ritual and myth may have decayed into mere entertainment in our secular and skeptical age, but the need to make sense out of the rhythms of the universe remains.

Nor is this just a matter of worrying about next summer's crops. The yearning to understand the mysteries of the universe—creation, death, destiny, the will of the gods—must go back to a time before agriculture. Hunters and gatherers need a surcease from winter as much as farmers do. The protection of higher powers must be invoked. We know that the Neanderthals, two hundred thousand years ago, placed offerings with their dead, and buried them facing the rising sun: surely an indication of a belief in the life of the spirit. And there can be no doubt at all that our own ancestors of the Paleolithic period who left paintings of shamans and goddesses on the walls of their caves thirty thousand years ago had some sort of deeply held religious feelings.

Which means, I am sure, that they sought answers to the riddles of existence, and turned to the tribal shaman for them. He told them stories that offered the consoling thought that the universe made sense, that out of tempest and chaos would come, ultimately, a reintegration of the familiar rhythms of life that the forces of nature had temporarily disrupted. And out of these tales came the rituals of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

resurrected god, and the myths that made those rituals comprehensible: a narrative structure that testified that life would resume once the hiatus of winter was over. These narratives would depict a conflict, ultimately resolved in a way that led to a powerful insight; and it was that satisfying moment of insight that had to be the climax of any story, and still is. Modern stories, even if writer and reader both are unaware of it, are shaped to drive onward toward that therapeutic climactic moment of insight and revelation that confirms belief that existence has meaning, that the universe is inherently rational: and for the moment, though we may no longer believe in gods, we are released from the fears that oppress us.

It's perfectly possible, you know, to write a story that has no plot at all, in which incident follows incident but no pattern emerges, no purposeful direction can be discerned. It's even possible to get such a story published.

But whether its readers will think it has provided them with the sort of nourishment they want from a story—well, that's a different matter. Consciously or not, I believe, we still follow traditions of storytelling built up across hundreds of thousands of years. Those traditions go back to humanity's earliest days, to prehistoric shamans who told stories, stories with beginnings, middles, and, of course, ends, satisfying, revelatory ends, so their listeners could better cope with the great terrifying mysteries of the universe. And that is what our storytellers are still doing, hundreds of thousands of years later. Or so I believe. ○

Chat online
with your favorite authors!

Bruce Sterling **May 25 @ 9:00 P.M. EST**
looks at *The Zenith Angle.*

Robert Silverberg **June 8 @ 9:00 P.M. EST**
The Science Fiction Writers of America's newest Grand Master reflects on his long career.

C.J. Cherryh **June 22 @ 9:00 P.M. EST**
will chat about her new book, *Forge of Heaven.*

Go to **www.scifi.com/chat** or link to the chats via our home page (**www.asimovs.com**). Chats are held in conjunction with *Analog* and the Sci-fi Channel and are moderated by *Asimov's* editor, Gardner Dozois.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the Net

James Patrick Kelly

FTL

hard

Probably the dirtiest little secret of our genre is that there is no such thing as hard SF about deep space. Hard SF? It's that particular kind of science fiction that prides itself on scientific rigor. **Allen Steele** <*http://www.allensteele.com*> has written that "Hard SF is the form of imaginative literature that uses either established or carefully extrapolated science as its backbone." Or as **Gregory Benford** <*http://www.authorcafe.com/benford*> has so often put it when he advocates for hard SF: "I'd rather have tennis played with the net up."

Alas, the net of scientific rigor catches the vast majority of the spaceships that we science fiction writers have imagined. The fact is that we aren't going to the stars if our current understanding of the universe holds; they're too far away and we're far too mortal. Or if we do make it out of our solar system, it will be only to visit our very nearest neighbors. **Alpha Centauri** <*http://homepage.sunrise.ch/homepage/schatzer/Alpha-Centauri.html*> is "only" 4.3 light years away. That's 25,278,149,538,273 miles, folks. It is sobering to consider that the fastest spaceships we've ever built travel at only 0.00004 percent the speed of light. If we limit ourselves to careful extrapolation, it's possible to imagine a spaceship that will travel someday at, say, 1 percent the speed of light, but that still makes the trip to Alpha Centauri four hundred and thirty years long—each way.

warped

But wait, some faithful reader might say. What about faster-than-light drives? FTL is pretty to think about and solves all kinds of plot problems, but, according to what we know now, it's impossible. Traveling faster than the speed of light has about as much meaning in the real world as traveling slower than stopped. Intrepid starship captains engaging their warp drives and daring explorers making the leap to hyperspace make about as much hard SF sense as Aladdin flying his magic carpet to Mars.

Which didn't stop NASA from launching the **Breakthrough Propulsion Physics (BPP) Project** <*http://www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/bpp*> in 1996. Its purpose was "to seek the ultimate breakthroughs in space transportation: (1) propulsion that requires no propellant mass, (2) propulsion that attains the maximum transit speeds physically possible, and (3) breakthrough methods of energy production to power such devices." While the project generated consid-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

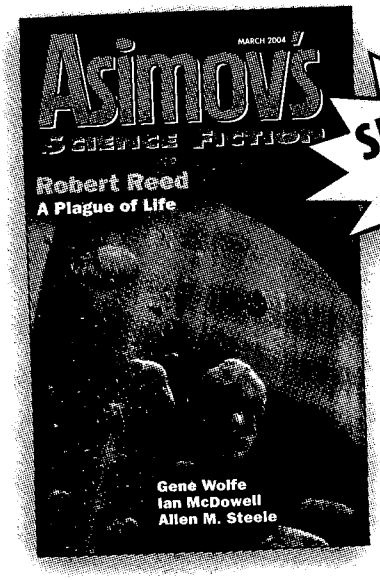
DON'T MISS AN ISSUE!

Subscribe today and have every intriguing issue of entertaining science fiction delivered direct to your door!

Analog Science Fiction and Fact

An unbeatable combination of stimulating fiction stories, provocative editorials, and fascinating articles, all solidly rooted in science fact. 1 year (12 issues*), just $32.97!

Visit **www.analogsf.com** →



SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

Asimov's Science Fiction

Novellas and short stories from the leading science fiction and fantasy writers. Plus, candid, no-holds-barred book reviews and guest editorials. 1 year (12 issues*), just $32.97!

← Visit **www.asimovs.com**

To order by charge card, call

TOLL-FREE: 1-800-220-7443 (9am - 5pm EST)

or mail your name, address, order, and payment to:

Dell Magazines Direct
6 Prowitt St., Suite S • Norwalk, CT 06855-1220

Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery of your first issue. Outside U.S.A.: Add $10 per year, per subscription for shipping and handling. All orders must be paid in U.S. funds. CT Residents: Please add 6% state sales tax to your total order. *We publish double issues twice a year which count as four issues toward your subscription. Expires 6/30/05.

34C-NSFSLL

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

erable enthusiasm in science fiction circles, it was controversial in the scientific community and all funding was cut in January of 2003. While there is a wealth of technical information on the site for the uber-geek, mere mortals may want to click to **Warp Drive, When?** <*http://www.lerc.nasa.gov/WWW/PAO/warp.htm*>, a marvelous introduction to the problems and possibilities of FTL by **Marc Millis** <*http://www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/PAO/html/warp/marc.htm*>, one of the creators of NASA's BPP. It's clear that Marc Millis believes that we will someday make the breakthroughs necessary to build interstellar ships, although he is a cautious enough scientist to answer the question **So, can we do it?** <*http://www.lerc.nasa.gov/WWW/PAO/html/warp/socanwe.htm*> with a graphic that screams *Sorry, not in the foreseeable future. Physics not yet known.*

Wil McCarthy <*http://www.wilmccarthy.com*> offers a very readable summary of FTL in his two part **Lab Notes** <*http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue195/labnotes.html*> and <*http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue199/labnotes.html*> over at **Science Fiction Weekly** <*http://www.scifi.com/sfw*>. In the second of these columns he discusses how quantum mechanics may—or may not, who knows?—give us a way to send our information faster than light, if not ourselves. Entangled quantum tunneling offers us a glimpse of how this might be accomplished, although that glimpse could well be a mirage. As Wil writes, "We may never find a way around these slippery barriers. In fact, there are so many barriers, everywhere we look, that many scientists have long considered the cause hopeless."

I'll pause here for an encomium. We live in what I consider the golden age of science explainers. Of the many wonderful writers helping us understand our baffling universe, Wil is among the very best. His columns at SFW are lively and nicely transparent to this English major; I can recommend his book **Hacking Matter** <*http://www.wilmccarthy.com/hm.htm*> to both SF fans and practitioners. What bugs me is that he is also one of science fiction's most dazzling novelists. Grr! The only flaw I can find in his stellar career is that he is only a very occasional contributor to *Asimov's*.

Yet another take on FTL travel are the **Great Moments in Science** <*http://www.abc.net.au/science/k2/moments/gmis9805.htm*> pages of Dr. Karl S. Kruszelnicki, Fellow at the School of Physics at the University of Sydney. Dr. Karl offers compelling counterarguments to some of the speculations of the BPP, although he points us toward the controversial energy source of **zero point energy** <*http://www.calphysics.org/zpe.html*> as the breakthrough discovery we can use to power our starships.

In 1994, Miguel Alcubierre, a physicist at the University of Wales in Cardiff, published a paper in **Classical and Quantum Gravity** <*http://www.iop.org/EJ/journal/0264-9381*> entitled **"The Warp Drive: Hyper-fast Travel Within General Relativity"** <*http://www.astro.cf.ac.uk/groups/relativity/papers/abstracts/miguel94a.html*> in which he ar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gued that it was theoretically possible to warp spacetime and zip at nearly infinite speed across the universe. You might accomplish this trick by compressing spacetime in front of your starship and expanding it behind. The operative word here is "might" because in order to build an Alcubierre Drive you need to be able to manipulate exotic matter, that is, matter with a negative energy density. This stuff is highly speculative and even if it does exist, no one has the slightest idea how to contain it, much less bend it to our purposes. Meanwhile, Mitchell Pfenning and Larry Ford of Tufts University crunched the numbers on the Alcubierre Drive and discovered that in order to warp an area of spacetime smaller than an atom you need to expend ten billion times the energy that exists in the entire universe!

In the abstract of his paper, Miguel Alcubierre writes, "It is shown how, within the framework of general relativity and without the introduction of wormholes, it is possible to modify spacetime in a way that allows a spaceship to travel with an arbitrarily large speed." In part, the initial enthusiasm with which the Alcubierre Drive was greeted arose from the fact that it did not rely on wormholes. **Kip Thorne** <*http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~kip*> wrote the book on wormholes in his classic **Black Holes and Time Warps** <*http://www.epinions.com/book_mu-2178385*>. In it, he tells how his friend, the late great **Carl Sagan** <*http://www.carlsagan.com*>, asked him to read the manuscript of **Contact** <*http://www.probe.org/docs/contact.html*> and vet the gravitational physics. This was a good thing, because Sagan had his heroine plunging into a black hole in order to arrive at a planet in orbit around Vega, which plunge would certainly have killed her. Thorne recommended that Sagan change the black hole to a wormhole. Although there are enormous difficulties in creating a transportation system using wormholes, such a system is at least possible. Sort of. Thinking about the problem led Thorne to consider questions that pushed physics to its farthest edge. He asked himself "What things do the laws of physics permit an infinitely advanced civilization to do, and what things do the laws forbid?" Note that this question does not address the likelihood that *Homo sapiens sapiens* will ever become infinitely advanced, or indeed that we will ever travel through wormholes.

Because building a **wormhole** <*http://www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/W/wormhole.html*> transportation system is a really big job, even for an infinitely advanced civilization. For one thing, there is still some question as to whether wormholes occur naturally. If they do, they are many times smaller than an atom. The trick is to capture one of the little buggers and then force its mouth way, way, way open and then coat the mouth with some of that highly speculative exotic matter (our old friend from the Alcubierre Drive) to keep the wormhole from collapsing in a catastrophic explosion. And then there's the problem of an exit strategy. Assuming that you could pass through the wormhole mouth, where would you come out? Unless you built another wormhole mouth wherever it was that you wanted to go, you would be taking a one way trip to a random destination. All in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all, the prospects for wormhole engineering do not look promising.

Here's another encomium: the link immediately above comes from one of the best written and most comprehensive space sites on the web, **The Encyclopedia of Astrobiology, Astronomy, and Spaceflight** <*http://www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/ETEmain.html*>. The encyclopedia is the work of **David Darling** <*http://www.daviddarling.info/index.html*>, the British astronomer and science writer, currently living in Minnesota. Entries range from *A for Andromeda,* the classic 1962 SETI novel by Fred Hoyle and John A. Elliott, to Benjamin M. Zuckerman, the astronomer and a pioneer in the search for extrasolar planetary systems. This is a monumental site that should be on everyone's favorites list.

In 1964 Russian astrophysicist **Nikolai Kardashev** <*http://www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/K/Kardashev.html*> proposed a way to classify advanced civilizations. A Type I civilization can use the energy resources of an entire planet, or about 10^{16} watts. A Type II civilization can harness the energy of a star, about 10^{26} watts. A Type III civilization would be able to tap the energy of an entire galaxy, about 10^{36} watts. On this scale, we are a Type 0 civilization, although we have certain aspirations to become a Type I in this century. In **The Physics of Interstellar Travel** <*http://www.mkaku.org/articles/physics_of_space_travel.shtml*> physicist Michio Kaku assigns theoretical advances in spacecraft propulsion systems to these various levels of civilization, pointing to our future in space. You need to check this out! He writes, "Most scientists doubt interstellar travel because the light barrier is so difficult to break. However, to go faster than light, one must go beyond Special Relativity to General Relativity and the quantum theory. Therefore, one cannot rule out interstellar travel if an advanced civilization can attain enough energy to destabilize space and time."

exit

I recently came across a very cool site called **SciFan** <*http://www.scifan.com*>, that has been online since 1999. Produced by French fan **Olivier Travers** <*http://webvoice.blogspot.com*> with the help of his girlfriend Sophie Bellais, **SciFan** is all about helping readers find what they want. The site classifies 44,968 books and 11,923 writers by themes and series. Each book entry gives the publisher and pub date, related themes and often as not a summary and brief review. When you query the database about FTL interstellar travel, it yields up pages and pages of some of the best science fiction ever written.

But that should come as no surprise. I hardly need to point out that interstellar travel has been the meat and potatoes of our genre for the last fifty years. It was never my intention here to disparage the work of my many literary betters. Hey, I love galaxy spanning yarns; it's no secret that I've written FTL stories myself. I'd love it if someday some young whippersnapper shoves this column in my face and says, "Hey Kelly, you were so damn wrong." ○

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DARK GOURMET

I put on my clothes
and they flap about me
like flags or tents.

Even my Armani
hangs no better
than some old rag.

I am a mere
shadow of
my former self.

Death
is such
a perfect diet

I can continue it
to the grave
and beyond.

One can never
be too thin
or too dead.

—Bruce Boston

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHADY GROVE

Allen M. Steele

"Shady Grove" is the sixth story in the "Coyote Rising" series. It follows the events of "Incident at Goat Kill Creek" (*Asimov's,* April/May 2004). The book version of this series will be published by Ace in December.

The revolution against the Western Hemisphere Union occupation of Coyote was the turning point of our lives. We'd come to the new world to escape one form of tyranny, only to have another take its place; we tried to run away, but found this was little more than a temporary solution. Sooner or later, we had to stand and fight.

No one wanted a war, but we got one anyway. Yet there are worse things than war. I discovered this in the winter of C.Y. 06, when the Union Guard attacked Defiance.

They appeared shortly after sunrise on the morning of Anael, Barchiel 29. Bill Boone was just ending his shift on overnight watch when he spotted two aircraft coming in over Mt. Aldrich from the east. He ran to the bell post and sounded the alarm, but it was early and most of us were still in bed, so only a few people managed to grab their guns before the gyros touched down in a farm field about three hundred yards from town.

Carlos and I were awakened by the bell, but we thought it was only another drill until the shooting began. He threw on his clothes, pulled his rifle off its hooks, and was down the ladder before I was even dressed. We'd discussed what we would do if something like this happened, so my duty was clear; I yanked Susan out of her bed, shoved her beneath it, then pulled off the mattress and stuffed it in after her to catch any stray bullets that might come our way. She screamed like hell—little girls don't like rough treatment, least of all before breakfast—and I tried to calm her as best I could, but by then I knew we were in trouble.

I was supposed to stay in the treehouse and protect Susan, but that's not what happened. This may sound negligent, but when your home is under attack, you've got a choice: either bolt the door and hide, or pick up a gun and go out to face the enemy. I'd long since made up my mind, without telling Carlos, that if the Union ever attacked Defiance, I wasn't going to play the role of defenseless female. When I was a kid back on Earth, I had the benefit of paramilitary training in Republic youth hostels; if anything, I was a better shot than my husband. So I told Susie to stay put and that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mama would be back soon, then I took down my own rifle, jammed in a cartridge, opened the floor hatch and jumped, not bothering to use the ladder.

I like to think I was brave. Perhaps, but I was also stupid. I was wearing nothing more than a thin nightshirt and a pair of drawstring pants, and in my haste I'd forgotten to pull on moccasins or a jacket; when my bare feet hit the ground, they sank into three inches of snow. If I wasn't fully awake by then, that did the trick. I hardly noticed, though, because all around me were my neighbors, coming down rope ladders and running across catwalks from one blackwood tree to another. An ice-fog lay thick above fields where only last autumn corn had grown high beneath camouflage nets; I couldn't see Carlos, but from the mist I could hear the popcorn sound of guns in full-auto mode, interspersed with the more distant noise of enemy fire.

The snow numbed my feet as a chill wind ripped through my clothes. I was useless as far as leading any sort of cavalry charge, so I headed for the nearest dry spot I could find, a well about a dozen yards away. The low stone wall that surrounded it had been swept clear of snow; I jumped on top, taking cover behind the wooden yoke supporting the bucket.

It was an absurd moment—Wendy Gunther, wife of the legendary Rigil Kent, crouched in her pajamas on top of a well—but there wasn't much else I could do. Leaving the cabin was a bad move; I realized that now. Yet there I was, all the same, so I held my rifle against my chest and waited for something to come close enough for me to shoot.

But the Union wasn't fighting fair that day. A sudden boom from out in the fields, then a high-pitched whistle as something hurtled through the air. I barely had time to realize what it was before a treehouse only a few dozen feet away exploded. Wood flew in all directions; I instinctively ducked, falling off the wall just in time to avoid having my skull fractured by a broken post that went sailing past my head.

"They've brought in a missile carrier!" someone yelled, and I raised my head to peer over the wall. I couldn't see anything save for vague forms firing into the fog, yet somewhere out there was a Union Guard skimmer. Doubtless it had come up Goat Kill Creek in a coordinated attack with the gyros. Another shriek, then a patch of ground about sixty feet away went up in a fireball. Men were thrown in all directions, hitting the ground as if they were little more than broken toys.

It's easy to talk about courage when you're sitting at the table, sharing a bottle of sourgrass ale with your husband; it's something else again when you find yourself the target of an armored hovercraft loaded with enough rockets to take out a small town. Hiding behind the well, I covered my ears, closed my eyes, tried to wish it all away. It was a bad dream, nothing but a bad dream. In a minute, I'd wake up to find out that I was still in bed, with Carlos curled up against me and Susan asleep on the other side of the room. Yet I couldn't ignore the evidence of my senses: the cold, the smoky odor of burning wood, the gunfire. This was no nightmare. My town was under attack. If we didn't do something, we were all going to die. . . .

"Get some rifles up here!" All around me, voices. "Don't fall back!" "Find some water, put out that fire!" "C'mon, dammit, *move!*"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No, I thought, *you can't do this. Go back to the cabin. It's warm and dry and safe up there. Susan needs her mother. You're not supposed to be here. . . .*

"Fan out! Don't let 'em get through!"

Another rocket ripped into the settlement. Another treehouse went up in flames. For a terrifying moment I thought it was my own, until I looked back and saw that, no, it wasn't mine, but the Gearys'. But it could have been my home, and Susan could have been . . .

"Where's the kids? Someone get the kids out of here!"

In that instant, something came over me. It wasn't bravery, or courage, or honor, or any of those things people who've never been in a firefight love to beat their chests about. Fear, yes, but also pure rage, plain and simple. Someone out there wanted to kill me, but worse than that, they wanted to kill my little girl, too.

And I just went berserk.

Before I fully realized what I was doing, I was on my feet, charging out from the treehouse village, racing into the fields with my rifle in my hands. The cold meant little to me now, the fact that I was barefoot even less. Nothing mattered save the cauldron of hate that boiled within me, a white-hot furnace that melted away all considerations for my own safety. This was my home, everyone and everything I loved and held dear. I couldn't—I *wouldn't*—let that be taken away.

Through the fog, I spotted a figure. Little more than a silhouette, but obviously a Union soldier. I went down on one knee, braced the rifle stock against my right shoulder. Line up the target in the crosshairs. Take a deep breath. Hold it. Fire. The rifle kicked against my shoulder. Three sharp cracks, and the half-seen Guardsman sagged in upon himself, toppled to the ground. I leaped to my feet again, continued to run forward. . . .

"Wendy!" From somewhere behind me, Carlos. "What are you. . . ?"

To my left, another soldier, this one closer than the first. I could see his uniform clearly, along with the face beneath his helmet. He gaped at me in astonishment, as if not believing what he was seeing, then his gun started to turn my way. No time to take careful aim; I sprayed bullets in his direction until he grabbed at the right side of his chest and pitched sideways. He squirmed on the ground, arterial blood spewing from a punctured lung, as I walked over to him. He was trying to raise a hand toward me, as if to beg for mercy, when I fired again. One shot, and his brains were blown across the snow. No mercy. If I could have killed him twice, I would have.

My friends and neighbors were running past me. I was about to join them when a heavy force slammed into my back, knocking me face-down to the ground. Snow stung my eyes, blinding me for a moment, as the rifle fell from my hands, landing a few feet away. For a second I thought I'd been hit. . . .

"What do you think you're doing?" Carlos was kneeling on top of me, pinning my body to the ground. "Stay down!"

I was trying to crawl out from under him when I heard engines. Rubbing snow from my eyes, I saw the colony's captured Union skimmer roar past, Clark Thompson standing behind the 30mm chain-gun mounted above its bubble canopy. He turned the gun upon a line of advancing sol-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

diers and mowed them down, then the skimmer—doubtless piloted by Barry Dreyfus, who had liberated the craft only last month during the Goat Kill Creek incident—roared away into the mists.

Carlos removed his knee from my back. "I thought I told you to . . ."

"Get off me!" I impatiently shoved him aside, scrambled to retrieve my rifle. "You want me to fight or what?"

Carlos started to argue, then thought better of it. "Just stick close," he said as he yanked me to my feet. "You don't want to get lost in this."

I wasn't about to object. The soldiers were among us, and now it was hand-to-hand combat within a white veil. I caught a glimpse of Paul Dwyer, blood streaming down one side of his face, as he buried a machete within the chest of a soldier. Ron Schmidt and Vonda Cayle ran past us, firing at anything that moved. Ben Harlan and Molly Thompson and Klon Newell: all newcomers to Defiance, yet nonetheless just as determined to defend the settlement as if they'd been here from the beginning. Ron Schmidt, one of the URS soldiers who'd tried to retake the *Alabama* when it was being hijacked, shot someone, then fell as someone else shot him.

A few feet away, Ellery Balis kneeled to the ground, a stolen Union Guard RPG resting upon his right shoulder. As a gyro lifted off a hundred yards away, Ellery trained his weapon upon the aircraft. He squeezed the trigger and a shell lanced through the fog. The gyro's port nacelle exploded; the aircraft careened sharply to one side, lost altitude, plummeted back into the mists and went up as an orange-red blossom. Ellery pumped his fist once, then stood up, tucked the RPG beneath his arm, and ran away.

"Let them handle this." Carlos pulled at me, trying to lead me to safety. "You're only in the way."

"No!" I tore myself loose. "I want to see!" In hindsight, I must have sounded like a petulant child, being told that she couldn't stay to watch the gory part of a flix. And perhaps I was; I'd never been in battle before, and there was a certain terrible fascination to all this. And I'd killed two men myself; now I wanted more.

Yet there were no other soldiers in sight. I could still hear gunfire within the fog, but it was less frequent now. Somewhere out there, I heard the chatter of dueling chain-guns, like two pianists madly trying to top one another in a lethal symphony; the missile carrier hadn't fired any more rockets, which meant that its crew must be engaging Thompson's skimmer. Another gyro lifted off; I could see wounded Guardsmen within its open aft hatch, staring down at us. Ellery fired another grenade at it, but it missed and the gyro peeled away.

And then, all of a sudden, an eerie calm descended upon the field. No more shots. No more explosions. It was if God has come down to silence the guns. Now I could only hear the groans of the wounded, the cries of the dying. The sun had risen above the mountains, its warmth burning away the fog, revealing bodies strewn here and there. Some still twitching, others perfectly still.

Now I felt the cold, and with it, a strange delirium. Leaning against Carlos, I turned away, began to lurch back toward town. It was over. We were safe. No one could touch us now. We'd fought back and won. But I felt no jubilation, no rejoicing. Only sickness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A body lay on the ground before us, lying in a patch of blood-drenched snow. For a second I thought it was a Guardsman, then I came close enough to recognize the face. . . .

Tom Shapiro. The former first officer of the *Alabama,* the first man to set foot on Coyote. His chest had been ripped apart, his sightless eyes dully reflecting the cold light of the rising sun.

I stared at him for a few moments, then I tore myself away from Carlos, staggered a few feet, then collapsed to my knees and threw up.

We lost Tom that morning . . . and twelve others, too, including Michael Geissel, Tony Lucchesi, and Ron Schmidt. The latter three were blueshirts, members of our local militia: the first to fight, and the first to die. Their lives weren't meaninglessly sacrificed, though; the bodies of fifteen Union Guard soldiers were also found, and no telling how many of their wounded were airlifted out by the gyro that Ellery failed to take down.

Over twenty of our people were wounded as well—some critically, including Henry Johnson, who took a bullet in the gut and came close to bleeding to death before Kuniko got to him, and Jean Swenson, who suffered massive internal injuries and severe burns across most of her body when one of the treehouses collapsed on top of her. As soon as the battle was over, we set up a tent as a temporary hospital—Kuniko's infirmary simply wasn't large enough—and started drafting people as blood donors.

Shortly after Defiance was established as a new colony, Kuniko began breaking me in as her assistant. Most of the *Alabama* crew members had first-aid training, but Dr. Okada was the only one among us who had gone to med school. So when I wasn't doling out pills and delivering babies, I was learning how to perform minor surgery.

If I was Kuniko's student, that day I received my final exam. Before then, the most I'd done was assist her in an emergency appendectomy; now I found myself removing bullets, tying off veins, stitching wounds, performing transfusions, and trying like hell not to lose either my wits or my stomach. By noon my arms were drenched with blood up to the elbows; we didn't have enough instruments to exchange them after each operation, so it was all that we could do to have them sterilized in boiling water before we went to work on the next patient. Don't ask about nanites, cloned cellular tissue grafts, or any of that stuff; we didn't have them. This was combat surgery at its most brutal, as primitive as anything since the early twentieth century. We didn't have enough drugs to go around, so we reserved general anesthesia for those who needed it the most, administered local sedatives to the others, and offered bite-blocks and jolts of bearshine to those strong enough to take it.

Not everyone made it. We did our best for Jean, and she toughed it out as long as she could, but shortly after midday she lapsed into a coma and two hours later she passed away. I pulled a sheet over her face and said a silent prayer for her; a few moments to dry my tears, then I went out to tell her husband that she was gone. That was the hardest thing I'd ever done; Ellery probably saved a lot of lives when he shot down one of the gyros, but in the end he'd been unable to save his own wife.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Someone once said that liberty is paid for with the blood of patriots. If so, then the bill was paid in full, for we saw a lot of blood that day.

Sometime around twilight, I finally left the tent and began trudging home, making my way along a quiet path that led through the trees. For a few minutes, I was alone, which was what I needed. I was exhausted, heartsick, and miserable. I'd seen enough violence and death to last a lifetime. Tomorrow morning we'd have to bury thirteen of our friends; up on the high meadows outside of town, their graves were being dug in the frozen ground with pickaxes, along with those for all the soldiers who'd been killed. My husband and daughter would be waiting for me; I wanted to take them in my arms, tell them how much I loved them, and then collapse in my bed and sleep for two years. It was early evening, yet it felt like midnight.

"Wendy? Got a few minutes?"

I looked around, saw Robert Lee coming toward me. From the Town Council meeting, I assumed. Vonda had come in to tell me that it was being convened in an emergency session while I was in the tent. I was a council member—the youngest, in fact—but there was no way I could attend. Vonda told me that she'd explain my absence, and someone would fill me in later on what happened.

"Yeah, sure." The last thing I wanted to do just then was talk to anyone. But this was town business, and it couldn't be avoided. "How did the meeting go?"

"Maybe I should wait till later. You look like you need a rest."

Someone had delivered hot coffee to the tent, but I hadn't eaten all day and my eyes were heavy-lidded. I was almost about to agree when I raised my eyes to look at him. Robert E. Lee wasn't just the mayor; he was also captain of the *Alabama,* our leader from the very beginning. Over the course of the past few years, his dark hair had become streaked with silver, his beard white as ivory. We'd often remarked upon how much he'd come to resemble his famous ancestor, sometimes even jokingly referring to him as General Lee, yet at this moment the similarity wasn't superficial. There was a darkness within his eyes that I'd never seen before; now he looked like a man who'd just fought a bloody battle and was aware that he'd have to fight again all too soon. You don't say *sorry, try me again tomorrow* to someone like this.

"No, go on. Let's have it now." I looked around, spotted the well behind which I'd taken cover an impossible amount of time ago. Strange that I would find myself here again; I sat down on the wall, bunching the hood of my parka around my neck.

Robert took a seat beside me. "First off," he began, "I want to tell you what a fine job you've done today. We would have lost more people if it hadn't been for you and Kuniko."

He was trying to say the right things, but only a couple of hours ago I'd pronounced Jean Swenson dead. Doctors may get used to the fact that they occasionally lose patients, but I barely qualified as a paramedic. Jean's death made me sick to my soul, and I wasn't ready to handle any well-meaning words of gratitude.

"Thanks," I mumbled, and there was a uncomfortable silence. Not far

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away, the ruins of the Geary house smoldered upon the ground. The tree in which it had been built was still standing; blackwoods are as tough as they are large, and it takes a lot to destroy them. If only human flesh were as resilient. . . .

"So what happened at the meeting?" I asked again, trying to change the subject.

Robert straightened his back, gave me the full run-down. Two houses were destroyed by enemy fire. The Geary and Sullivan families were moving in with friends until new homes could be built for them, but the Construction Committee informed the council that it was unlikely that new treehouses could be erected within the next two months—i.e., the end of Machidiel, the last month of winter. A grain silo had also been destroyed; like the cabins, it could be rebuilt, but one-third of the autumn harvest saved for the feeding of livestock had been lost. The Farm Committee had been instructed to put the goats and chickens on half-rations and look toward culling their numbers by slaughtering the older animals. This in turn meant a reduction of food; we could only hope that we'd be able to hold out until we were able to plant new crops next spring.

Finger-pointing was inevitable. Some of the council members were inclined to blame Rigil Kent—i.e., Carlos and his brigade—for bringing the Union down upon us, yet Robert refused to hear this. He pointed out that the Union had been looking for Defiance for over two Coyote years now, and despite all our precautions it was only a matter of time before they managed to locate our position. Luisa Hernandez would have ordered a raid even if there hadn't been a resistance movement, he said, and in fact we should be thankful that Rigil Kent had captured a patrol skimmer last month, otherwise we probably wouldn't have been able to beat off the attack.

There was one bright point. Lew Geary had inspected the missile carrier —at this, I had to wonder; his house had been destroyed, and the man was still capable of examining the machine that did it—and determined that it could be salvaged, even though its cockpit was riddled with bullet holes and one of its engines had been shot up. Its launchers still worked, with eight rockets remaining in their magazines. Lew already had his people working on it, and they hoped that the skimmer could be restored to operating condition. To defend the town if—or, more likely, when—the Union returned.

And that was the question. When would they attack again? And what could we do about it?

"This isn't over. Not by a long shot." Robert idly tapped at the ground with a stick he'd picked up. "They know where we are. Sooner or later they'll try again."

"We need to fortify the town. . . ."

"We discussed that. Sandbag emplacements, tiger traps. And now that we've got enough guns to go around, everyone is going to be armed." He shrugged. "But I've got a feeling that they were just testing our defenses. See how much we could take."

"You don't think they were serious?"

"Oh, they were serious, all right . . . to a certain extent." He turned his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

head to gaze across the field where only a few hours earlier we'd fought for our lives. "But we know that they've received several hundred troops from the ship that arrived last month, along with heavy equipment like that missile carrier. So why didn't they throw everything at us at once?"

"They were taking a poke at us. Seeing what we're made of." I remembered the bullies I used to have to deal with when I was in the youth hostel. The dumb ones came straight at you with their fists; if you could take them down the first time, then they'd leave you alone, knowing that you'd fight back and it wasn't worth getting a bloody nose. The guys you really had to watch out for, though, were the guys who prodded and needled you, seeing how much you could take, observing your weaknesses. Only then would they attack: late at night, when you weren't ready for a pillowcase over your head and baseball bat to your stomach. "I think I understand."

"I thought you would." Robert nodded appreciatively; he knew my life story. "Then you know our situation. Even if we arm everyone in town, we're still on the defensive. That isn't where you want to be if you have any hope of winning. Sooner or later, we're going to have to bring the fight to them."

I raised an eyebrow. "You've got a plan?"

"Sort of." His voice became quiet. "Nothing I've told anyone yet . . . or at least, no one who's still with us. Tom knew, but . . ."

Robert stopped, looked away. Before his hand came up to rub his face, I saw tears in his eyes. As long as I'd known Captain Lee, this was one of the few times I'd ever glimpsed even a trace of deep emotion. Perhaps Dana, his mate and the *Alabama*'s former chief engineer, saw a side to him that we didn't. To most of us, Robert was intensely private, even enigmatic. Tom Shapiro had not only been one of his senior officers, but also a close friend. Losing him hit closer to home than he was willing to admit.

"I've got an idea, yes," he said, looking back at me again with dry eyes. "If it's going to work, though, I've got to know that we've got little to lose. As it is now, there's too much in our way."

"What are you saying?"

He let out his breath. "We've got to do something about the kids."

As soon as he said this, I knew he was right. I'd charged into battle, barefoot and with little more than a rifle to defend myself, only because I was afraid for Susan. If Carlos and I had been killed that day, our daughter would been left an orphan, just as both he and I had been left without parents the first few days after the *Alabama* reached Coyote.

Susan had been the first child born on the new world, but now there were nine other children in Defiance. Among them were Tom's son, Donald, born only a few months later; Tom's wife Kim was not only a widow now but also a single mother. I'd tried my best to protect my daughter, but taking out a couple of soldiers doesn't count for much when a missile carrier is lobbing rockets at your home. And the neighborhood bully likes it when you've got one hand tied behind your back.

"You want to get them out of here?" I asked, and he nodded. "Got any suggestions?"

"In fact, I do," Robert said, and then he told me all about it.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I went home and slept for a few hours. Night had fallen by the time I woke up, and Carlos and Susan had already made dinner. Carlos warmed up some of the leftover stew; while I ate at the table, Carlos took Susie to bed and read her a story. We'd been making our way through *The Chronicles of Prince Rupurt*—a generation of Coyote children were growing up with Leslie Gillis's fantasy—yet I noticed that he skipped the scene where Rupurt fights the skeleton army. Susie had been very quiet all evening; she was nine years old by Gregorian reckoning, but she was very much aware that several of her parents' friends had lost their lives that day, and she didn't need to be frightened any more than she already was. When storytime was over, I gave her a good night kiss while Carlos turned the lamps down, then we put on our coats and slipped out onto the porch to have a talk.

We could see lights glowing in treehouse windows, hear muted conversations, and yet the paths and crosswalks were empty. There was a certain stillness I'd never seen before, as if Defiance was an injured animal, licking its wounds as it curled in upon itself. Not far away, we could see Lew and Carrie picking through the ruins of their home, their flashlight beams roaming across the wreckage as they searched for any belongings they might be able to salvage. From somewhere nearby, there was the sound of two flutes: Allegra DiSilvio and her companion Sissy Levin, playing "Amazing Grace" in duet as night closed in upon town.

Carlos unfolded a couple of camp chairs and set them up on the narrow porch, and we kept our voices low so as not to wake up Susan. I told him about what Robert and I had discussed a few hours earlier, how he thought it was wise to send the children away in case there was another attack, and I wasn't surprised when Carlos told me that Lee had already broached the subject with him as well.

"I think it's a good idea. If Susan had been killed, it would have been . . ." His voice trailed off, and he looked at me sharply. "That's why you went out there, wasn't it? You were trying to protect her."

"I know. That wasn't part of the agreement." I looked away. "It was either that, or . . ."

"I understand. It was just that . . ." He shook his head. "Look, when Rigil Kent has gone out, I've never had to worry about you and Susie, because I knew you were safe back here. But when I saw you today, I couldn't do what I had to do, because now I had to look out after you as well."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to . . ."

"Let me finish." He held up a hand. "I realize all that. You did what you thought had to be done. But you know, and I know, that the next time this happens . . . and there probably will be a next time . . . we can't afford to worry about mothers and children being caught in the crossfire. If we have to . . ."

"You're not listening to me. You think I'm against the idea. Not at all. Not in the slightest. Robert's right. I think it's time to get the kids out of here."

"You do?" He peered at me through the darkness. "How much has he told you? I mean, about where we'd go. . . ?"

"He mentioned a new settlement up north along the Gillis Range. Shady

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Grove, near Mt. Bonestell. The Union doesn't know about it yet, so . . ." Suddenly, I realized what he'd just said. "What do you mean, 'we'? He asked if I'd be interested in taking the children up there, and I told him I would, but he said nothing about . . ."

"Robert's playing both ends against the middle. Typical politician." Carlos chuckled, then became serious again. "No one expects you to go off into the wilderness all by yourself. It's almost eight hundred miles to Shady Grove. He asked me to go with you, and I told him that I would."

"But . . ." This caught me by surprise. "What about everything else? Like, defending the town?"

"We've got plenty of people here for that. They don't need my help." He hesitated. "There's more to this than you know," he added. "I need to talk to some people up there."

I was about to ask about what before I remembered something Robert had said earlier: *sooner or later, we're going to have to take the fight to them.* For the past two years, Rigil Kent had been waging guerilla warfare against the Union. Occasional raids upon Liberty and Shuttlefield to steal weapons and destroy shuttles, the sabotage of the Garcia Narrows Bridge . . . hit-and-run tactics, without any clear purpose except hope that the Union would surrender New Florida and leave alone those who'd fled to Midland.

For awhile, it seemed as if our side was winning. Then the Union Guard raid on Thompson's Ferry ended in the settlement's destruction and the loss of many lives. Shortly afterward, the Union had established a military base on Hammerhead and an attempt was made to capture Carlos; the mission was unsuccessful, but they'd managed to figure out where Defiance was located. Since then, reports had come in about Union attacks upon settlements along the Gillis Range: Forest Camp, on the Midland side of East Channel, was assaulted, and New Boston near the Medsylvania Channel had been hit as well. Shady Grove was one of the few towns that had remained untouched.

A few weeks ago, though, our satphone link to the new colonies was severed, indicating that someone had boarded the *Alabama,* still in high orbit above Coyote, and pulled the plug on the transceiver. So now all contact with the other towns was either done by short-wave radio—itself a risky business, since those transmissions could be monitored from space and triangulated to their source—or through word of mouth, which was more reliable, but much slower.

Carlos had assumed the name Rigil Kent in order to protect his identity if any of his small group of resistance fighters were ever captured. There weren't many to begin with—Carlos, Barry, Ted LeMare, and a few others—but as their numbers expanded to include second-wave immigrants who'd fled from New Florida, his alias came to be attached to the group as a whole, and Carlos found himself in the role of a military leader. Warlord of Coyote . . . almost sounded like a twentieth century fantasy novel. Didn't seem so funny now.

"Robert told me you've got something planned," I said quietly. "What is it?"

Carlos didn't respond for a few moments. I knew that silence: he was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wrestling between a choice of how much he wanted to tell me and revealing no more than I needed to know. "We're working on something," he said at last. "It's pretty big, and there's going to be a lot of people involved. But more than that . . ." He shrugged. "Sorry. Can't talk about it."

Of course, there were good reasons why he couldn't take me into his confidence. Nonetheless we'd journeyed down the Great Equatorial River together, split up, patched things together again, had a child, become married . . . a lot of water under the bridge, and it stung that he couldn't trust me. "Yeah, okay, sure . . ."

He caught the hurt in my voice. "I'm sorry, but we're still pulling things together. That's one of the reasons why I'm making the trip with you. It's not just to help you watch out for the kids. It's also because I have to . . ."

"Talk to some people. I understand." A new thought occurred to me. "But if Shady Grove's that far away, why don't we just take the *Plymouth*?"

The *Plymouth* was the remaining shuttle from the *Alabama*; its sister ship, the *Mayflower,* had been left behind in Liberty, after we'd cannibalized it for every usable component. For the last three years it had remained grounded, concealed beneath camouflage covers in a field about a mile from town. Now and then Robert, Dana, and Tom had gone out there to clean it up, reactivate its major systems and test-fire its engines, yet it hadn't moved an inch since it had been used to evacuate most of the *Alabama* party and our belongings from Liberty. It was still flightworthy, though; if you wanted to transport nine children and several adults across eight hundred miles, that was the quickest way to do it.

Carlos shook his head. "We're not using *Plymouth*. We'd get there quicker, but . . ." He hesitated. "We'd just as soon not remind the Union that we've got a spacecraft. If they remember it at all, better to let them assume that it's rusting away somewhere."

Ah-ha! But I didn't say anything. "So we're riding shags? Or are they classified as well?"

He chuckled, patted my knee. "Yeah, we'll have the shags. As many as we need. I know Susie thinks they stink, but . . ."

"She'll get used to it. The other children will love it." I took his hand. "So it's you, me, the kids . . . and who else?"

"Don't know yet. Haven't thought that far ahead. Maybe Chris. . . ?" He caught the look in my eye—I still had personal problems with his oldest friend—and quickly shook his head. "Chris should stay back, help hold down the fort."

"Barry's good with children. Maybe Klon, too." The kids loved Uncle Klon; he made a great Santa Claus, and his pad was filled with old fantasy stories he'd brought with him from Earth.

"They'll need both of them back here. Barry's my second-in-command while I'm gone, and Klon has to help build the fortifications. It's going to be hard for us to spare many people for this. Besides, we've only got room for four adults." He paused. "I was thinking about asking Ben. He's got this sort of back-country experience."

"If he'll do it." It had been nearly a year since Ben Harlan had attempted to lead the members of the Church of Universal Transformation across

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mt. Shaw. He still didn't like talking about what had happened up there; apparently he'd lost someone whom he cared about. But Carlos was right; Ben knew what the Gillis Range was like in the dead of winter, and he got along well with kids. "I'll ask him," I said. "Maybe he'll sign on." I thought about it for a moment. "Kim should go, too. She'll want to look out after Donald."

"We can't risk sending Kim. She knows how to . . ." He stopped himself, but I knew what he was going to say. Kim Newell had been the *Plymouth*'s co-pilot; with Tom gone, she was needed to fly the shuttle, for whatever they intended to do with it. "I think we should take Marie."

Something within me went cold. "I know she's your sister, but . . ."

"She's good with a gun. And the kids like her. . . ."

"Hell they do. Susie hates her."

"Marie's going. I've already told her so." Before I could object, he stood up, headed for the door. "It's late. Time to go to bed."

The caravan left Defiance two days later.

We were supposed to leave shortly after daybreak, but it wasn't until mid-morning that we were able to mount up. There were a lot of teary farewells as mothers and fathers hugged their children, made sure that they had their hats and gloves, promised them that they wouldn't be gone very long. A couple of kids refused to let go of their parents and had to be gently prised away; others wept or threw tantrums when they were told that they couldn't bring their dogs or cats because we wouldn't be able to feed them. I had a lot of private discussions with their folks; each one needed to tell me about their child's personal needs, and I had to assure them that they wouldn't be neglected.

I'd half-expected Ben Harlan to refuse to join us, so it came as a surprise that he didn't. He still walked with a limp, from having lost two toes to frostbite during his ordeal on Mt. Shaw, and he warned me that he couldn't do any serious hiking, but when I told him that we'd ride most of the way, he was willing to undertake the task. He liked the children, and besides, he'd lately graduated from herding goats to minding the shags. And, although he didn't say so, I think he privately needed to confront the mountains again, if only to exorcise the memories of what had happened to him last year.

The saddest moment came when Kim Newell said goodbye to Donald. They'd been through a lot in the last forty-eight hours; first Tom's burial, and now this. She would have preferred to go with us, but she also knew that she was needed here, so she clung to her son until we were ready to saddle up. When I looked back, she had her head against Robert's shoulder, weeping as if she'd never see her son again.

We had five shags: four to carry adults and children, and one to haul all the food and camping equipment. Susan and the four other older children —none of whom were more than nine Earth-years, with Susie the eldest—were able to sit upon saddles along with the adults, although we made sure that they were secured with harnesses so they couldn't fall off. The four youngest children were little more than toddlers; for them, we'd fashioned papoose-bags that were slung over the sides of each animal.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We gave names to the two groups, taken from the Prince Rupurt stories—the older kids were called Scouts, the younger children Dauphins—while the grownups were referred to as High Riders. The arrangement worked out well; at any one time, each shag carried a High Rider, one or two Scouts, and one Dauphin. Susan was designated Chief Scout for as long she chose to serve. I whispered in her ear that, at some point, she might have to share that title, to which she agreed, albeit reluctantly.

The shags were well-suited for the trip; their coarse fur was warm, their elephantine legs tramping through the snow as if it were nothing more than soap flakes. The children were still upset, so again we tried to make the best of it by giving the Scouts the privilege of naming the shags. After much discussion, they settled upon Achmed, Zizzywump, Sally, Old Fart, and George the Magnificent. Go figure; it helped cheer them up a bit.

We made good time; by early afternoon of the first day, we reached Johnson Falls, where Marie and I dismounted to lead the children across the rope bridge above Goat Kill Creek while Carlos and Ben took the shags through the shallows upstream. We gave the shags a few minutes to shake off the icy water—which the kids loved, since it reminded them of big, grunting dogs—then we climbed aboard again and continued making our way up the trail that lead us up the northern side of Mt. Aldrich.

I knew the kids pretty well because Kuniko and I had seen them troop through the infirmary at one time or another with the usual childhood bruises, fevers, and earaches. Susan, Donald, Lewis, Genevieve, and Rachel were the Scouts; Lilli, Alec, Ed, and Jack were the Dauphins. Every one of them had their own personalities with which I was familiar, and before long the High Riders were known to them as well. Carlos was our undisputed leader—whatever he said, that was the rule—and they looked up to him with reverence. I was Dr. Gunther, the surrogate-mother who made sure their caps were on tight and their harnesses weren't too loose. Ben was the easy-going chum who told jokes and tended to the shags and made sure that we'd stop whenever anyone needed to pee.

But Marie . . . they didn't know quite what to make of Marie. As a teenager, she was the youngest of the High Riders, and the children immediately realized that she wasn't much older than them. Yet she remained aloof from them: sitting stolidly upon her saddle, rifle never leaving her hands, eyes constantly searching the mountainside as if expecting Guardsmen to emerge from the woods at any moment. Donald rode with her until we reached Johnson Falls; after we crossed the bridge, though, he insisted upon riding with me, and almost threw a fit until Susan, in her role as Chief Scout, volunteered to take his place.

It wasn't just Marie's inability to warm up to children that made me wish we'd left her behind. She hadn't been much older than Susan was now when the *Alabama* reached Coyote; since then, a certain hardness had entered the eyes of the little girl who'd once splashed around in Sand Creek and giggled whenever she saw Carlos and me sneak a kiss. Over the course of the last couple of years, she'd changed into a person whom I barely recognized: cold, tough, cynical, and on one notable occasion even bloodthirsty. Last month, she'd shot an unarmed Union soldier in cold

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blood, and jumped up and down as if he'd been nothing more than a swamper caught prowling through the garbage.

Marie was scary, and she made the children nervous, yet Carlos insisted that we bring her. "I don't want to leave her here," he'd said when we argued about this the day before our departure. "Lars and Garth are a bad influence, and I'd like to get her away from them for awhile. And since I'm putting Chris in charge of the outfit while I'm gone, I don't want the three of them getting together to pull something behind his back."

It was difficult to argue with that. The Thompson brothers were stone killers, no question about it; Carlos had recruited them to join Rigil Kent shortly after they moved to Defiance along with their uncle and aunt, on account of the fact that they'd fought the Union Guard before, and it wasn't until much later that he realized just how merciless they could be. Marie had lately been spending a lot of time with Lars, and not just to trade tips on how to keep their rifles clean; this worried Carlos, too, even though he tried not to pry into his sister's personal business. And although Chris Levin had recently rejoined us, quite a few people still didn't trust him—I wasn't sure how much I did, to tell the truth—and his authority as temporary leader of Rigil Kent was shaky at best. Lars and Garth might not be able to work against him, but if they had Marie on their side. . . .

So there were good reasons why Carlos would want to keep his sister close to him. Besides, she was good with a gun, and we'd be on the trail for four weeks; it was still winter, so the boids were in their migratory grounds on the southern coast of Midland, but there was no telling what else we might run into out here in the wilderness.

All the same, though, I privately vowed to keep a close eye on my sister-in-law. We might be kin now, but I didn't want to leave her alone with the children for very long.

Nonetheless, the journey to Shady Grove was largely without incident.

We spent two days climbing Mt. Aldrich and coming back down the other side; in terms of geography, that was the hardest part, because there was no clear pass over the mountain and we had to spend a cold and windy night on a ridge below the summit. But we set up the tents so that we were all together, and after dinner that night, Ben began telling the kids a story they'd never heard about Prince Rupurt. It wasn't something Leslie Gillis had written, and indeed Ben would later tell me that he'd been making it up as he went along, but the children were fascinated all the same, and that night he ended with a cliffhanger that made them want to hear more. Tomorrow night, he said, and only if you're good, and then we put out the lights and went to sleep.

And this pretty much set the pattern of our days for the next two weeks. Shortly after sunrise the High Riders would get up, stir the ashes of the campfire and get a fire going again, then start making breakfast while we woke up the children. A bite to eat, then the Scouts would disassemble the tents and help the Dauphins into their papooses, and then we'd reload everything upon the shags and start making our way northeast along the southern side of the Gillis Range. Once we descended from the mountains, the forest occasionally gave way to lowland marshes, yet they were still

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frozen over and the shags had little trouble wading through the swampy areas. On good days, we'd make fifty miles or more; at our worst, when we'd encounter a ravine that we'd have to skirt, only about forty. But aside from the occasional snow-squall or having to stop to retrieve something valuable that someone had dropped, we made good time.

It wasn't always easy. The children got homesick, and it passed like a virus among them, with a lot of crying jags, until they finally got over it. Lewis and Donald got into a nasty fistfight one evening over whose turn it was to wash the dishes, and days went by before Genevieve would talk to Rachel again after a feud over something about which I never learned. Lilli got diarrhea, and Ed and Alec came down with colds, so I had to tend to them. Jack demanded that he become a Scout—and indeed, he was the oldest and largest of the Dauphins—so after considerable discussion we decided to make him a Scout Apprentice, with all due privileges: now he had to wash dishes and help the older kids forage for firewood. Two days of this, and he wanted to be a Dauphin once more. Yet every night, all their differences were put aside as they curled up against each other and waited for Ben to continue the further adventures of Prince Rupurt. I think Ben spent most of his time trying to figure out how he'd get Rupurt and his friends out of the latest peril he'd put them in the previous night.

We had other ways of having fun. Every few days, we'd choose a new Chief Scout. Susan didn't like this until I pulled her aside and told her to play nice with her friends; she snuffled a bit, then let Donald be the next Chief. Carlos taught the Scouts how to make a fire with damp wood, how to determine location from the position of the sun and stars, how to guide a shag with little more than a slight tug of their reins, while I showed the Dauphins how to make snow angels and tie square knots. One night, we sat up late to watch a rare convergence of Coyote's sister moons Dog, Hawk, and Eagle against Bear's ring-plane.

And every day, our destination grew a little closer. Mt. Bonestell was the highest point on the Gillis Range, and also the second-tallest volcano on Coyote, exceeded only by Mt. Pesek on the western side of Hammerhead. Like Mt. Eggleton and Mt. Hardy in the southern hemisphere, it had been named after a twentieth century astronomical artist—Henry Johnson's idea—yet even though Pesek was the largest, Bonestell was impressive in its own right. An enormous cone rising twenty-six thousand feet above sea level, its flat-topped summit was beyond the reach of any climber unaided by oxygen. Frequently shrouded by high clouds, it was awesome to behold on a clear day. We had compasses and maps to guide us, but even if we'd lost them, we would have been able to find our way to Shady Grove simply by hiking toward Mt. Bonestell.

On the eleventh day, shortly after we'd stopped for lunch, we heard the low clatter of rotors. Looking up, we spotted a pair of tiny specks moving across the sky, coming from the west. Not taking any chances, Carlos quickly moved the caravan beneath a couple of roughbarks, and there we waited while two gyros cruised high overhead, heading due west. Until now, the Union had been the least of our worries; this small incident reminded us that our journey wasn't a camping trip, as we had managed to pretend, but something far more serious.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Three days after we saw the gyros, we were about sixty miles from Shady Grove. We'd entered the broad mountain valley between the Gillis Range and Mt. Bonestell, where Longer Creek flowed south from the highlands; the marshes behind us now, once again we were surrounded by dense forest, but we'd located a trail leading north to the settlement. Barring any problems, we'd reach our destination in a couple of days. Ben was carrying the radio, and once we were within range he planned to get in touch with the settlement and tell them we were coming.

Late that afternoon, as Uma was beginning to set behind the mountains, we came upon a small clearing that looked suitable. By now the Scouts and Dauphins had become accustomed to their roles; while the High Riders unloaded our equipment from George the Magnificent, the Dauphins helped unroll the tents and the Scouts went into the woods to scrounge for firewood. The kids liked sharing the responsibilities; the older ones had made it a game to see who could find the best dry wood, and the toddlers had learned how to use branches to sweep away snow to make room for the tents. So we had the tents set up, and Lewis and I were breaking up kindling for the fire, when we heard a girlish scream from the woods.

At first, I didn't think much of it. We'd become used to this sort of thing; someone finds a dead swamper decaying under the leaves, or a kid takes a snowball and shoves it down the back of another kid's parka. Easy to ignore. But then I heard the scream again, and this time it had a note of pure terror; the other guys heard it, too, because Carlos and Marie dropped the rain tarps they were setting up and Ben scrambled out of the tent where he'd been taking a siesta. I told Ben to stay back with the Dauphins, then Carlos and Marie grabbed their rifles and we bolted for the woods.

We were only about fifty yards from camp when Genevieve came running toward us. Clingberries covered her arms and legs where she'd charged through the undergrowth, and there was a thin streak of blood across her nose from where a low branch had whipped against her face, but it was the look in her eyes that I noticed first: absolute horror, as if she'd just seen something that scared her half to death. She ran past Marie and Carlos and barreled straight into my arms as I kneeled to stop her.

"I saw . . . I saw . . . I saw. . . !"

"Easy, easy. It's all right. Everything's okay." I stroked her hair as she buried her face against my parka. Never before had I felt a child tremble so much. "You're safe. You're fine. . . ."

"What did you see?" Marie was standing nearby, her rifle half-raised. "C'mon, kid, spill it. What'd you see?"

"Marie. . . ." Carlos shot her a look, then crouched down next to us. "We're here," he said, laying a hand on Genevieve's shoulder. "Nothing's going to get you, I promise. Now what did you. . . ?"

"A . . . a . . . a m-man. A l-l-little man."

I stared at her. "You saw a man?"

"Uh-huh. A li-little man." " Genevieve snuffled, raised her face. Tears diluted the blood from her cut; she started to wipe them away, but I caught

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her hand, not wanting the scratch to get infected. "B-but not like a real man. L-like a . . . a monkey. A monkey, with fur and everything."

A little man, or a monkey. Which was more implausible? The nearest human settlement was over sixty miles away, nor were there any monkeys, or simians of any kind, on Coyote. Genevieve must have learned the word from tutorial discs, because it was beyond the range of her experience.

"Probably a creek cat." Disgusted, Marie lowered her gun, started to turn away. "Hell. . . ."

"Go see what you can find." Carlos nodded in the direction from which Genevieve had come. "If you spot anything . . ." He hesitated. "Don't shoot. Just come back, that's all."

Marie looked at him askance. "You can't be. . . ."

"Just do it, all right?" By now we could hear the other Scouts crashing through the underbrush toward us; they'd heard Genevieve's screams and were rushing over to investigate. Marie gave her brother a skeptical look, then walked away. Carlos watched her go, then turned to Genevieve again. "You saw a little man," he said quietly, looking her straight in the eye. "What did he do? Did he say anything?"

"N-n-no. H-h-he was just standing behind a t-t-tree, w-watching me." She was calming down a little, beginning to pick clingberries off her parka. "And . . . and then he started for me, and t-then I . . ."

"You ran away?" I asked.

"Uh-huh." She looked up at me again. "Did I do something wrong?"

"Not at all, sweetie. Not at all." I took her in my arms again, but she was through crying by now. When her friends showed up a few moments later, Genevieve told them all about what she'd seen.

Marie returned awhile later with nothing to report, and that was it for the evening. We discussed the incident over dinner, and although Genevieve stuck to her story the other kids either disbelieved her, or else believed her but decided that this was just another story like the ones Ben had been telling them all along. When you're very young, the line between fact and fantasy is very thin; this was a good ghost story, and it helped us get them in bed a little earlier than usual.

Carlos and I didn't get a chance to talk that night. Even if we had, though, I don't think he would have told me everything he knew. Yet just before we tucked away the kids, he told Ben that he'd take the overnight watch, and quietly cautioned us to keep our guns where we could find them in the dark.

He knew something we didn't. But he wasn't letting on.

Two days later, late in the afternoon, we reached Shady Grove.

The town was smaller than Defiance by at least half, and looked little like it: a nine-foot stockade wall of blackwood timbers surrounding a half-dozen longhouses, thatch-roofed barracks providing shelter for ten people each, arranged around a small commons where a well had been dug. Just outside the stockade were barns and corrals for livestock, tool sheds and grain silos; not far away was a broad plastic dome, apparently a greenhouse. The front gate was open, and we could see wood smoke rising from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behind the walls; nonetheless, I had the impression we were approaching a fortress. It should have been comforting, but it wasn't.

A watchtower rose on stilts from the center of town; as we came within sight, a sentry called down to someone below. We'd barely reached the gate when several dozen men and women rushed out to greet us. The residents of Shady Grove may have been strangers, but they treated us as if we were long-lost relatives. They clapped us on the backs, shook our hands, introduced themselves so fast that I was barely able to remember their names. Several men helped us unload the shags before they were led to a nearby corral, then we trooped inside the stockade and went straight to the main lodge, where we discovered they had already prepared dinner for us.

Shady Grove had been in existence for about five months. Its population was little more than fifty—all adults, although a few women were obviously expecting children soon—but in that short time they had done well by themselves. Life in Shuttlefield and Forest Camp had taught them how to make do with what little they'd managed to bring with them when they'd escaped. The greenhouse we'd seen earlier was carefully stitched together from transparent plastic tarps and heated by a wood furnace; in this way they had managed to grow crops even in the dead of winter. The longhouses had been built with energy conservation in mind; internal partitions allowed for privacy while allowing heat from wood stoves to circulate through the rafters, and the cracks between the log walls were stuffed with cloverweed as insulation. One of the longhouses served as the main lodge; long tables ran down half of its length, and it was there that everyone had breakfast and dinner. No one was starving; no one was sick. Everyone here worked hard to survive, sure, but that was the way it was in Defiance, too.

It seemed as if everything was perfect. We'd crossed eight hundred miles of wilderness to find a settlement inhabited by friendly people who'd welcomed our arrival. There was a storage space in the back of the lodge that could be cleared out to make room for the children; a few more bunk-beds would have to be built, but that wasn't much of a problem. And they had enough food to go around, so long as no one minded shag stew on occasion; although the residents also used shags as pack animals, they weren't disinclined toward slaughtering the old and weak. I decided to keep my mouth shut about this; people in Defiance had come to revere shags as more than livestock and seldom had we eaten one, and only then in desperation.

The mayor of Shady Grove was Frederic LaRoux. A geologist by training, he'd been a member of the expedition that Chris Levin had led up the Eastern Channel to pick out a site for the Garcia Narrows Bridge. Following the sabotage of the bridge, he and the others had fled Forest Camp, making their way across the mountains to establish Shady Grove on the other side of the Gillis Range. Carlos had met him back then, but only briefly, and over dinner they came to know each other a little better. But once the tables had been cleared and Carlos broke out one of the jugs of bearshine he'd brought with us, the discussion became more serious.

"I appreciate the necessity of what you've done," Fred said, speaking in Anglo, "and why you had to do it. But Rigil . . . Carlos, I mean . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't worry about it. You can call me Rigil." Carlos grinned as he poured a shot of bearshine for LaRoux. His mastery of the newer form of English had become better now that Chris had taught him the nuances. "Most people in the new settlements know me only by that name. I'm used to it by now."

"As well you should. You've become something of a legend, you know." Fred settled back in his chair, idly swishing the liquor around in a ceramic mug. "Rigil Kent, scourge of the Union, leader of the revolution. . . ." He raised an eyebrow. "When we first met, you were younger than I'd expected. But now that I see that you have a wife and child . . . this explains much."

"Just trying to protect them, that's all." Carlos glanced in my direction. Ben had escorted the children to bed, and everyone else was either cleaning up or doing other odd jobs. For the moment, it was only the three of us. "I hope this isn't an inconvenience. We're asking a lot of you."

"Under any other circumstances, no, it wouldn't." Fred shook his head. "Either the Union doesn't know we're here . . . rather unlikely, since we're out in the open . . . or our town is so small and remote that they don't consider us much of a threat. It's also possible that they've seen our stockade and figured that we'd be a hard target to take down."

"They used a missile carrier against us," I said, speaking up for the first time. "Your walls wouldn't stop something like that."

Carlos cast me a look. but LaRoux nodded. "She's right. We couldn't fight them off if they came at us the way they came at you. But we've kept our heads low, haven't caused any trouble. Maybe that's the reason."

"Maybe for now, but not very much longer. " Carlos bent forward. "Sooner or later, they're going to . . ."

"Why is this inconvenient?" Yes, I was trying to change the subject. Carlos was looking for recruits, but my top priority was the safety of the children. "Is there something we should know about?"

Fred took a drink, made a face as the corn liquor scorched his throat, then rested his mug on the table and tapped his fingers against it. "There's an irony in all this," he said, very quietly, "because I was thinking about sending someone down south to ask if we could take refuge in your town."

Carlos stared at him. "But you just said . . ."

"I know, I know. But this isn't about the Union." He let out his breath. "Tell me something . . .while you were coming up here, did you feel any tremors? Did the ground shake at all?"

Carlos and I looked at each other. "No . . . no, we didn't," he said, and I shook my head.

"Good. Glad to hear it." Fred took another sip. "Twice since we've been here, we've experienced small tremors. Nothing major . . . just enough to break a few things and knock down part of the stockade. All the same, I think we made a serious mistake by settling here."

"Earthquakes?" I nearly said *Coyote-quakes,* but that would have sounded silly.

"No. Worse than that." He hesitated. "We don't have any seismographs, and right now I'd give an arm and a leg for a decent tiltometer, but it's my professional opinion that Bonestell is coming out of a dormant period."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The volcano?" I leaned across the table to look him straight in the eye. "We thought it was . . . y'know, dead. Inactive. Whatever."

"Not a chance. Oh, Mt. Pesek is probably extinct. It's a shield volcano, very old, maybe one of the reasons why Coyote has a breathable atmosphere in the first place. Ditto for Mt. Eggleton down south. But I have little doubt that Bonestell is coming out of dormancy, and that it's only a matter of time before it blows."

"How long?" Carlos asked.

"Can't say. Even if I had the right instruments, I couldn't tell you that. Predicting volcano eruptions has always been an inexact science at best. But I wouldn't bet against it happening sometime in the next year. If and when that happens, the last place I want to be is here." He glanced over his shoulder to make sure he wasn't being overheard, then lowered his voice. "We're happy to take care of your children, but pretty soon we're going to have to abandon the town and head south ourselves. Maybe you ought to keep this in mind."

While we were mulling that over, he drained the rest of his mug. "But that's not all," he said as he reached across the table for the jug. "There's something else . . . we're not alone out here."

"What do you mean?" Carlos kept his voice neutral, but there was something in his face that told me he was guarding something.

Fred started to pick up the jug, then reconsidered and put it down again. "The last couple of months, some of our people have seen things in the woods. Sometimes they look like . . . well, I know this sounds silly, but they look like monkeys." He glanced first at me, then at Carlos. "I know how this sounds, but it's not cabin fever. We've had things turn up missing, stuff that was left outside overnight. Anything small enough to be taken away."

Carlos remained quiet, absently running a fingertip around the rim of his mug. "One of the girls saw something like that yesterday," I said.

"She did?" Fred nodded grimly as he let out his breath. "You know, I'm almost glad to hear you say that. I didn't want to mention it to you, because . . . I dunno, maybe you'd think we'd gone around the bend. But if you've seen these things, too . . ."

"Keep the children in the stockade," Carlos said abruptly. "Don't let them go out, not under any circumstances." He knocked back a slug of bearshine, then looked at me. "He's right. This was a mistake. We should never have come here."

"What. . . ?" I couldn't believe what he was saying. "You're . . . I mean, you're telling me we. . . ?"

"Fred, we appreciate your hospitality. You've been very kind, and we won't forget this. But I think we should take the kids and head back as soon as we can." He pushed back his chair and stood up. "If you want to send anyone with us, we can make room for them. It may not be safe here much longer." He hesitated, then added, "With the volcano being active and all, I mean."

Fred was just as astonished by this as I was. "Sure. Whatever you say. I can ask around, see if anyone wants to . . ."

"It's been a long ride to get here. Let's talk more about this tomorrow."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carlos stepped away from the table. "I'm going to go check on the kids, make sure they're tucked away. See you in the morning. Good night."

I caught up with him just before he opened the door leading to the back of the lodge. "What aren't you telling me?" I whispered, grabbing his arm and pulling him aside. "You know something."

Carlos didn't reply. For the first time since we'd been married, he avoided looking at me. "It's important," he said at last. "I've kept it from everyone for a long time now. Maybe I should I have talked about it earlier, but . . ." He glanced back at the dining room, where Fred was still seated at the table, gazing at us in puzzlement. "This isn't the time or place," he added softly. "Ask me again tomorrow."

"If it's that important . . ."

"It is." Now he looked me straight in the eye. "But it'll keep until the morning. Will you trust me till then?"

I was tired. He was tired. This wasn't a good time to carry on a long conversation. "All right," I said, letting go of his arm. "Sure. But tomorrow . . ."

"Of course." Carlos forced a smile, then bent down to give me a kiss. "I love you," he murmured. "Now let's make sure the kids are in bed."

When morning came, I awoke to find Shady Grove already up and around. The smell of hot coffee and cooked food permeated the log walls; chickens cackled and roosters crowed as they were fed, and men and women murmured to one another while they walked past the shuttered windows of our longhouse. Carlos turned over and wrapped himself against me. I opened my eyes to see Ben scratching at himself; in the bunk above him, Marie tried to burrow beneath her blankets.

It was a cold winter morning, and it had been many days since the last time any of us had slept in a bed with a roof over our heads. One of the women had told me that the community bath house had warm water. The tank was solar-heated, and so long as we didn't pump too much we could get a decent shower. So I prized myself loose from Carlos, put on my clothes, and headed for the bath house. The others could sleep a little while longer; I just wanted to feel clean again.

The sun was up, rising over the southeastern flanks of Mt. Bonestell. No clouds in the sky; with luck, maybe we'd get through the day without any more snow. Through the open gate of the stockade, I could see townspeople heading out to do the morning chores. None of the adults in Shady Grove slept late, and neither did the children. The Scouts were playing tag in the commons while the Dauphins built a snowman nearby. I spotted Susan talking to an adult, and for a moment I considered going over to introduce her, but decided to let her make friends by herself. She might like it here . . . if Carlos allowed her and the other children to stay, that was.

The bathhouse had two stalls, marked MEN and WOMEN, with a dividing wall between them. It was small, with unfinished faux-birch floors and walls, but there was a small stack of shag-fur towels on the table and a bar of lavender soap in an aluminum can nailed to the wall beneath the showerhead. I took off my clothes and hung them up on the door, then shivered against the cold as I worked the pump handle until I received a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thin cascade of water. Not much better than lukewarm, but still a luxury I hadn't enjoyed in two weeks; I stood beneath the shower and felt the sweat and grime of eight hundred miles wash off of me.

Carlos couldn't be serious about taking the children back. Yes, it was possible that Mt. Bonestell might erupt, but even LaRoux hedged his bets about when this might occur. And if an eruption was imminent, surely they'd have enough advance warning to evacuate the town and head south. But that wasn't what bothered my mate; it was the sightings of these so-called monkeys. Clearly he knew something about them, and last night he had admitted as much. If only he'd tell me. . . .

From somewhere nearby, I heard a dinner bell begin to ring. Time for breakfast. I rinsed my hair, then turned the spigot to turn off the water and reached for a towel. Even if Carlos insisted on leaving, there was no sense in rushing home. I was in no hurry to hit the trail again, and the kids would only fret. If we stayed a couple of days, he might come to his senses. I loved him dearly, but sometimes he took things much too seriously. . . .

Feeling much more civilized, I made my way across the compound to the lodge. The children had already gone in, leaving behind a half-finished snowman, and only a couple of townspeople were in sight. The gate remained open. There was no one on duty in the watchtower; the sentry was climbing down the ladder, heading in to get some chow. I noticed all these things, but paid no attention to any of them. My hair was wet and my stomach was rumbling; the only thing that mattered was getting in from the cold and putting some food in my belly.

The dining hall was filled to capacity: men and women crowded next to one another on the benches, passing bowls of *kasha* and plates of fresh-baked cornbread down the line. The kids were scattered here and there across the room; they were probably sick of seeing each other, because only a few of the Dauphins sat together. The older ones had joined adults who'd taken them under their wing; to see the townspeople already adopting the Defiance children as if they were their own reinforced my belief that we'd done the right thing by bringing them here.

I found Carlos, Marie, and Ben sitting with Fred LaRoux at the far end of the middle table. "See you've found the bath house," LaRoux said, grinning as Carlos and Ben moved aside to make room for me. "Enjoy yourself?"

"Very much, thank you." I wished I had dried my hair a little better, though, for it hung in damp snarls around my face. "Wish I could do that every day."

He shrugged. "Three times a week is all we get, or at least until we get around to building more facilities. No shortage of well-water . . . we've got a pretty deep aquifer . . . but putting in the sewer pipes is murder." He glanced at Ben. "Did y'all have the same problems?"

"Sort of." He took a bowl of wheat porridge that was handed to him, passed it to Carlos. "Piping wasn't a problem so much as heating the water. We've kept everything under the trees, so there was no way we could use passive solar systems. We're still taking cold baths."

I smiled at that. Ben hadn't been around when we'd put in the water pipes, but he knew enough about them to be able to discuss them. "Did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Susan like her shower?" Carlos asked, dipping his spoon into his bowl to stir the *kasha*. "Hope so . . . the kids are beginning to reek."

"She didn't come with me." I looked at him in puzzlement. "Last time I saw her, she was outside, talking to someone."

"She must have come in with them, then." Carlos put down the spoon, raised his head to peer across the room. "Susan!" he called out, and a woman seated about a dozen feet away looked toward him. He ignored her, called again: "Susie! Susie Gunther!"

No response. I searched the room with my eyes, called for her myself. No Susan.

Rachel was the nearest Scout, and one of Susan's closest friends. I got up and went over to her. "Have you seen Susan?" I asked.

Always fastidious, Rachel took a moment to chew and swallow the cornbread in her mouth. "She went out," she said nonchalantly, as if this explained everything.

"Out? Out where?"

"Out the gate."

I turned toward Carlos, but he was already pulling on his coat and heading for the door. I tried to tell myself that this was probably nothing. Susan had taken it upon herself to take care of the shags; she was particularly concerned about Old Fart, who had begun to show his advanced age. Just a small matter; we'd find her in five minutes, after which she'd receive a scolding from Mama and Papa and a long time-out in the longhouse while her friends got to play.

But she wasn't at the corral, nor was she visiting the greenhouse nor any of the outlying sheds. We didn't find her feeding the chickens, and she wasn't playing hide-and-seek under the floor beams of the longhouses. Within a half-hour, almost everyone in town had joined the hunt; breakfast was forgotten as people who barely knew her name searched for her in every conceivable place.

The adult with whom I had seen her talking told Carlos that she'd expressed interest in Longer Creek; he'd told her that it flowed down from the hills north of town, and that this was where they did most of their fishing. He hadn't seen her since then. So Carlos, Marie, and I walked around behind the stockade, and sure enough, there were her footprints in the snow, leading in the direction of the narrow river and the woods that surrounded it.

We started to follow them, still calling her name, but we'd just entered the woods when Marie suddenly stopped. "Oh, hell," she muttered, staring down at the ground, "look at this."

Here were Susan's footprints, barely four inches in length, continuing through the ice-crusted powder. But now, on either side of her, were several other sets of tracks; bipedal and four-toed, less than three inches long, with deep heel-marks and sharp indentions at the end of each toe.

"Oh, my God." Carefully stepping around them, Carlos followed Susan's footprints a little farther. "Oh, dear God, no. . . ."

Now I saw what he was seeing. The alien tracks emerged from the woods on either side of Susan's; they surrounded hers, and here was a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deep impression in the snow where she had fallen down. Her footprints emerged from the scuffle, becoming deeper as if she'd tried to run away, yet in her panic she'd headed in the wrong direction, away from the stockade and toward the forest. . . .

"They caught her here." Marie pointed to another place where she'd fallen down. "There must have been two . . . no, three, maybe four. . . ."

"Oh, God." Carlos was fixated upon the tracks. "They wouldn't do this. It's not their way. They only want *things*. . . ."

"What the hell are you talking about?" I lost my patience. No, not just my patience; my mind, too. I grabbed Carlos's shoulders, turned him around to face me. "What haven't you told me? Who are they?"

In that instant, I saw something in his eyes I hadn't seen in years. Fear, as terrible as any man could have, yet not of death, but of the unknown. He pulled himself loose from me, turned to his sister. "Marie, go back and get the guns. Tell Ben to stay back and take care of the kids, but you get the guns and round up a few more people, then come after us."

"Why don't you go back yourself and. . . ?"

"They're fast. Believe me, they're already way ahead of us. If we follow them now, we may be able to catch up to them. But if we go back to town, they'll have that much more of a head start. And Ben can't keep up with us, not with that bad foot of his." He pointed back the way we'd come. "Now move . . . and get back here as quick as you can."

Marie hesitated, then turned and began to sprint back toward town. "C'mon," Carlos said, taking my arm. "We don't have much time." He glanced at me, saw the look on my face, and nodded. "I'll try to explain as we go along."

Three and a half years ago, by the LeMarean calendar, Carlos had taken off by himself to explore the Great Equatorial River. I've told my part of that story before: how he'd left me, Barry, Chris, and Kuniko behind after our attempt to explore the river had failed. I was carrying Susan then, so I couldn't go with him—not that I particularly wanted to; Carlos and I weren't on good terms at that point in our relationship—and so for nearly three months Carlos was on his own, not returning to Liberty until I was going into labor.

I thought I'd learned everything about that *hegira*—his term for his "spiritual journey"—but I was wrong. There was one thing he'd kept secret, not only from me, but also from everyone else.

He'd paddled his canoe along the southern coast of Midland, seeing our future homeland as no other human had ever seen it before, until he reached its southeast point. Following a brief conversation via satphone with me and Chris—and I hate to admit it, but we weren't very kind to him—he decided to keep going west, raising his sails to cross the Midland Channel to a small island south of Hammerhead. At first, it seemed as if the island was little more than sand and brush, yet on his first night there he discovered that it was far from deserted.

"I thought they were just animals." By now we were hiking uphill, following the tracks as we made our way through dense forest toward the lower slopes of Mt. Bonestell. "Like raccoons or maybe overgrown pack-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rats . . . but then I found something that made me realize that they were intelligent. There was this tiny knife. . . ."

"What?" Despite the urgency of the moment, I stopped. "You're saying you found intelligent life on Coyote?"

He looked back at me. "Uh-huh. That's what I'm saying. Now c'mon. . . ." Still talking, he continued up the trail. "Intelligent, but very primitive . . . sort of like little Cro-Magnon men. They knew how to make tools, how to build fires, erect structures from the sand. Even something of a language, although damned if I could understand it." He chuckled to himself. "And, man, were they a pain in the ass. I spent nearly a week on the island, and it was all I could do to keep them from stealing everything I had. I called them sandthieves after awhile. But they were pretty peaceful. Just as curious about me as I was about them."

"And you didn't tell anyone about them?" If the circumstances had been different, I would have had a hard time believing this.

"No, I didn't. I . . . oh, no. Look at this."

We'd come to Longer Creek. It wasn't very wide at this point, its surface frozen over, but that wasn't what distracted him. Susan's footprints stopped abruptly upon its bank. Carlos bent over, picked up something from the ground, turned around and held it out to me.

"Oh, God!" I whispered, putting my hand to my mouth. It was Susan's little cap, the one Sharon had woven from shag fur and given to her for First Landing Day last summer. "Is she. . . ?"

Carlos kneeled, inspected the smaller tracks within powdery snow on top of the ice that lay across the shallow creek. "No. She's still with them. They just picked her up to carry her across. She probably tried to fight, and that's how her cap got knocked off." He took a few tentative steps out upon the ice; it groaned a bit, but remained solid. "We can make it across," he said, offering his hand. "Let's go."

We carefully walked across the creek, trying to avoid soft spots in the ice; when we were on the far side, the tracks continued, Susan's among them. Now I could see Mt. Bonestell clearly through the trees, looming above us as a massive, snow-capped dome. "Go on," I said. "Give me the rest of it."

"Not much more to tell." Carlos shrugged as he continued to lead the way. "They're intelligent, no question about it. But I was pretty cynical about everyone I'd left behind, and I didn't want all these people descending upon them, the way European explorers did to the American Indians, so I kept it to myself. Even named the place Barren Isle so that no one would think anything important was there. And I haven't told anyone until now." He looked back at me. "You're the first."

"But if they're peaceful. . . ?"

"I *thought* they were peaceful." He stopped, bent over to clasp his knees and catch his breath. "But these aren't the same sandthieves. The ones I found over there didn't know how to swim or build boats, so they couldn't have come over here. And if everyone says they're the size of monkeys, then this bunch must belong to a different species, or tribe, or . . ." He shook his head. "Whatever. The ones I met weren't that large. But they must be just as intelligent, and if they've taken Susan . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Let's go." I didn't need to hear any more; I pushed past him, taking the lead. My daughter had been abducted by these creatures. I didn't care how peaceful their relatives on Barren Isle might be; I wanted her back.

The slope quickly became steeper, the snow more thick, yet urgency pumped adrenaline into my blood, made me forget the cold in my lungs and the ache in my muscles. More than once I was tempted to stop for a moment, take a break, but then I'd look down at the ground to see Susan's small footprints surrounded on either side by those of the sandthieves, and my steps would quicken. That, and the realization that we *had* to be catching up to them. Carlos said the sandthieves were fast, and doubtless they were strong enough to scurry up a mountainside without breathing hard. Yet they had a human child among them; even if they were forcing her to run, her very presence would slow them down. And twice already Susan had tried to escape; if they were half as intelligent as Carlos said, then they'd need to keep a close eye on her, and that would slow them down even more.

So we couldn't be far behind. And as it turned out, we weren't.

So intent were we upon following the tracks, that we didn't look up to notice that the mountainside had changed until I raised my eyes and saw a massive bluff looming before us. At first I thought it was another limestone formation, like those prevalent throughout Midland, but as we came closer, I saw that it was dark grey rock. Much later, talking it over with Fred LaRoux, I'd learn that this was ignimbrite, volcanic ashes left behind by ancient eruptions that had been compacted over time to form a substance much like concrete. Sometimes called tuff, it had often been used on Earth as construction material. In parts of China, houses were built of bricks carved from ignimbrite quarries, but in northern Italy the opposite approach had been taken, with homes and shops being excavated within tuff deposits.

That's what we were seeing now. The vast rock wall rose above us, and within that wall were dozens of doors and windows, resembling natural caves until I realized that their shapes were much more regular, their distance from one another obviously deliberate. The trees around the wall had all been cut down; here and there along the wall I spotted small wooden platforms jutting out from above-ground doorways to form terraces. Rough fabric, like woven grass, covered some of the windows as curtains, while smoke from fires burning somewhere inside seeped through chimney-holes here and there.

It looked somewhat like an ancient Pueblo cliff-dwelling, yet that wasn't my first impression. What I saw was a fortress, hostile and impregnable, somehow obscene. And from behind all those doors and windows, eyes that studied us as we emerged from the woods.

Carlos stopped. "That's far enough," he said quietly, almost a whisper. "They know we're here." He nodded in the direction of the nearest window. "See? It's hard to sneak up on them. Probably heard us coming a long time ago."

I caught a brief glimpse of a tiny face—coarse black fur surrounding overlarge eyes and a retracted snout—before it disappeared. Here and there, I spotted small figures within doors and windows, vanishing as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

soon I looked directly at them. We were watching them, but they'd been watching us for much longer.

And not just watching. The air was still and quiet, scarcely a breeze moving through the trees behind us. Now I could hear a new sound: a rapid cheeping and chittering, punctuated here and there by thin whistles and hoots, animalistic yet definitely forming some sort of pattern. They were talking to one another.

"Oh, crap," I murmured. "What do we do now?"

"Stay calm." Carlos pointed to the tracks we'd been following. They led away from us, straight toward a doorway at ground-level. "She's somewhere in there. They must have just taken her inside."

So what do we do now? Charge into an alien habitat in search of our daughter? Fat chance. From the looks of it, the cliff-dwelling could have been honeycombed with dozens of passageways, all of which were so small that we'd have to bend double just to get through the largest of them. We were unarmed, and Carlos had already discovered that these creatures were capable of making knives. A small cut from a tiny flint blade might not mean much, but a hundred cuts just like it would kill you just the same. Negotiation? Sure, sounds good to me. What's the word for hello? So I did what any mother would do.

"Susan!" I shouted. "Susan, can you hear me?"

I stopped, listened. Silence, save for the cheeps and chirps of the cliff-dwellers. I raised my hands to my mouth. "Susan? Sweetie-pie, do you hear me?"

"Susan!" Carlos yelled as loud as he could. "Susan, we're out here! Answer us, please!"

We shouted and screamed and called her name again and again, and then we'd stop and wait, and still we heard nothing. In the meantime, the sandthieves were becoming a little braver. Apparently realizing that we weren't about to storm their habitat, they ventured to the windows and stood in the doors, cheeping madly at one another until it almost sounded as if they were mocking us. And maybe they were; one of them, a little larger than the others and wearing what looked like a serape, stood on an upper parapet and jumped up and down, hooting in glee. Frustrated, I picked up a stick and wound back to hurl it at him.

"No!" Carlos snatched the stick from my hands. "It'll only excite them. Trust me, I've tried that already."

"Trust you?" I turned upon him. "Why didn't you trust *me?* If you'd only told me . . . if you'd just been honest . . ."

"I didn't know . . . I didn't think they'd . . ."

"Mama!"

The sound of Susan's voice stopped us. For a moment, we couldn't tell where it was coming from, except that it was in the direction of the cliff dwelling.

"Susan!" I shouted. "Baby, where are you?" I could see nothing in the windows except sandthieves; yet they'd suddenly gone silent, and even the big one on the parapet was now longer prancing. "Susan? Can you. . . ?"

"Here! I'm up here!"

I raised my eyes to peer at the top of the bluff, and there was.Susan, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tiny figure standing alone at the edge of a wooden platform. My heart froze when I saw her. She was nearly sixty feet above the ground. Two or three more steps, and she'd fall over.

"Stay there!" Carlos yelled. "I'm coming to get you!" I couldn't see how he could, but he was determined to try anyway. He'd taken no more than a few steps, though, when another voice came to us from above:

"Stay where you are!"

Looking up again, I saw a human figure standing next to Susan. No, not quite human; with great wings like those of a bat rising from his back and fangs within an elongated jaw, he bore a resemblance to a gargoyle. Yet, though I'd never laid eyes upon him before, I immediately knew who he was. And so did Carlos.

"Zoltan," he whispered.

Zoltan Shirow. The Reverend Zoltan Shirow, if you cared to call him that. Founder of the Church of Universal Transformation, the religious cult that had followed him to Coyote. They'd worshipped him as a prophet, believing that he held the key to human destiny, but the truth of the matter was that he was a madman, and the only destiny to which he'd led them was death.

The last person to see Zoltan alive was Ben Harlan. From what he'd told me and the other members of the Defiance town council, he'd fled for his life when it became apparent that Zoltan intended to kill him on Mt. Shaw. He later led an expedition to the camp just below the summit, where they confirmed that the group had resorted to cannibalism, yet Zoltan's own remains were never found, and the body count had come up short by two. Since then there had been reports, delivered now and then from hunters who'd ventured into the Gillis Range, of a bat-winged figure lurking within the woods, sometimes with a woman beside him.

No one had ever given much credence to these claims, least of all myself. Yet here was Zoltan, alive and well, standing next to my little girl. Even from that distance, I could tell Susan was badly frightened; she didn't want to be anywhere near him, but she was all too aware that she was standing close to the edge of the platform.

"Don't you dare . . ." My voice was a dry croak; I had to clear my throat. "Don't you dare hurt her!" I shouted. "Bring her down from there!"

Carlos glanced back at me. "Wendy, don't provoke him. He's . . ."

"I have no intention of hurting her." Although Zoltan scarcely raised his voice, we could hear him clearly. The sandthieves were all quiet now, and I noticed that most had fallen to their knees. "In fact, if you want her back, then I'm happy to oblige."

Before Susan could react, he bent forward and swept her up his arms. And then, holding her tightly against his chest, he stepped off the platform.

I think I screamed. I must have, because I heard it echoing off the cliff. Yet, as the two of them plummeted toward us, Zoltan's wings unfurled, spreading out to their maximum span, catching the air and braking their descent as if he were wearing a parachute. Zoltan couldn't fly—his wings, grafted onto his body long ago on Earth, didn't have the muscle structure

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

necessary for that—but apparently he'd learned how to use them to glide short distances in Coyote's lesser gravity.

Nonetheless, it was a long fall, and he was burdened with Susan's extra weight. He hit the ground hard, taking the impact on bent knees, his breath whuffing from his lungs. He managed to hold onto Susan the whole time, though, and as soon as they were down, she wiggled out of his arms and dashed toward us. Carlos kneeled down and caught her; she wrapped her arms around him, sobbing and refusing to let go as he murmured into her ear.

From the cliff dwellings, the sandthieves leaped up and down, chattering and squawking to one another, out of their minds from what they'd just seen. I couldn't blame them; I was pretty much out of my own mind, although for different reasons. "What the. . . ? Who the hell do you think you are?" I demanded, ignoring both husband and daughter—in fact, forgetting everything else—as I marched toward him. "What do you think you're doing, pulling something like. . . ?"

"Quiet!" Zoltan raised a hand as he slowly stood erect. He winced as he did so—no doubt he'd pulled muscles in his thighs and calves—yet he maintained the unholy charisma that had allowed him to gather more than two dozen disciples to his side and lead them across time and space to an unknown world. "I've done as you've asked, in the quickest way possible. Aren't thou grateful for the miracle you've witnessed?"

He turned to Carlos. "And you . . . you, I know. Once already I've saved your life. Now I've saved that of your daughter. Have you no gratitude in your heart?"

"What's he talking about?" I looked at Carlos. "When did he. . . ?"

"I'll tell you later." Carlos shot me a sidewise look—*not now*—as he stood up, still holding Susan in his arms. "I remember. You didn't give me a chance to thank you before, but . . . well, thanks. And thank you for letting her go."

Obviously, there was more to all this than I knew. I'd have to get the whole story from Carlos at another time; as before, he'd been keeping secrets from me. Just then, though, I was more concerned with the here and now. "Why did you take her?" I said, looking at Zoltan again. "She's just a little girl. She means no harm to you."

"Exactly. She's just a little girl." Zoltan smiled, revealing the tips of his fangs. Not very comforting. "The *chirreep* . . . that's what they call themselves . . . had never seen a human child before you came here. Adults, yes, but never a kid."

"You know their language?"

"Only a little. They have to actually show something to you and tell you what it's called before you know what it means. So when they told me that a group of small outsiders . . . *kreepah-shee,* their word for you . . . had appeared in the valley, I tried to get them to explain what they meant." An apologetic shrug. "So they found one and brought her to me. They didn't know she was a child . . . just an immature *kreepah-shee*."

Now I understood. As Carlos had told me, the sandthieves, the *chirreep*, were an alien race, very primitive, that had only recently felt the hand of man. Zoltan had asked an innocent question, and they'd done their best

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to oblige him: take one, bring it back, and show it to him. By their nature, they were used to stealing things, so why stop with a child?

"So what are you to them?" Carlos handed Susan over to me, being careful never to turn his back upon him. "Their leader? I mean, either you found them, or they found you, but obviously they respect you."

"Can't you tell?" I nodded toward the *chirreep*; they were still silent, their heads lowered supplication. "He's not their leader . . . he's their god."

"Thank you for recognizing this." Zoltan's wings rippled slightly as he stood a little straighter. "Many years ago, when I received divine inspiration to come to this world, I believed the Almighty wanted me to lead the human race to a higher plane. Since then, I've come to realize that I misunderstood His message. Man is a flawed creature, beyond redemption. I learned this when my followers . . . all but one, whom I saved as my consort . . . perished because of their inadequacies, and the one whom we'd trusted as our guide betrayed us. He paid for his sins. Cast out, he died alone, and now his soul suffers in . . ."

"You mean Ben Harlan?" Carlos shook his head. "Alive and well. He told us all about . . ."

"Be quiet!" His wings stretched out once more, and the *chirreep* quailed in alarm, squeaking among themselves at this outburst. "I won't tolerate blasphemy in my house!"

"Sorry," I said. "I apologize for my husband." If Zoltan wanted to believe that Ben had been his own personal Judas, then let him. We may have found Susan, but we were still on dangerous ground. "Please, go on, Reverend Shirow. I'd like to hear more about . . ."

"I no longer acknowledge that name. It belongs to the man I once was, before the final station of my transformation. I am now *Sareech* . . . the messiah, the one who has come from the stars." He beckoned to the *chirreep* behind him. "These are now my people, the ones I was truly meant to lead. Unspoiled, innocent, without original sin. Man is lost, but they . . . they are my flock. And they are under my protection."

If Zoltan hadn't been insane before, he certainly was now. When he'd come to Coyote, he'd been satisfied with merely being a prophet. Now, with his original followers gone, and having stumbled upon a primitive species willing to worship him, he'd elevated himself to godhood. And indeed, there was no one else who could challenge that claim. He was the only human on Coyote who looked the way he did . . . and the *chirreep* didn't know any better.

"I understand this," Carlos said. "Believe me, I do. I found some sand . . . *chirreep,* I mean . . . several years ago, on an island south of here."

"You have?" Zoltan peered closely at him. "The *chirreep-ka?* Their legends tell of another tribe across the waters, lost many years ago, but I didn't . . . they didn't . . . know they still existed."

Some god. He didn't know about another group of sandthieves only a thousand or so miles away. "They're there, all right," Carlos went on, "but I didn't let anyone know about them. I wanted to protect them, keep their existence a secret. And I won't tell anyone about your *chirreep* if you'll just . . ."

"It scarcely matters, does it?" Zoltan looked at Susan, huddled in my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

arms. "When she was taken, you came after her, and in doing so you found this . . . and there's no doubt that others will follow you. Perhaps this is part of my destiny. To save them from you and your kind."

For a moment, he'd almost sounded human again. "Then we can go?" I asked. "We can. . . ?"

"Leave. No one will harm you." He smiled, once again exposing his fangs. "Besides, it makes very little difference what you may say or do. *Corah* will soon speak again, as it did many years ago. It once changed all life on this world, and soon it will do so again."

"*Corah?*"

He pointed toward the summit of Mt. Bonestell. "*Corah.* The destroyer." When he looked at us again, his eyes promised fire. "Now go. Make peace with yourselves, if you can. The end of the world is near."

Then he turned, began to walk back toward the cliff dwellings. Seeing that their god was returning to them, the *chirreep* broke their silence; once again, they began to twitter and chirp amongst themselves, bounding in and out of the doors and windows of their city. It wasn't hard to figure out what they were saying. All hail mighty *Sareech,* our lord and savior. He confronts the *kreepah-shee* and sends them packing. *Sareech* is our man. . . .

"Let's go," Carlos murmured. "I don't want to give him a chance to change his mind." He took Susan from my arms. "C'mon, Scout. Piggyback ride all the way down the mountain."

Susan nodded, but didn't smile or say anything as her father swung her up on his shoulders. She'd lost a bit of her innocence that day, although it would be many years before I knew just how much. But for now, we had our daughter back, and that was all that mattered. . . .

Yet, just before I turned away, I caught a glimpse of something moving on the parapet where we'd first seen Zoltan and Susan. Looking up, I spotted a lone figure: a woman, wearing a frayed and dirty white robe, its cowl raised above her head. Thin and terribly frail, she leaned heavily against a walking stick, like someone who was ill; she peered down at us, and in the brief instant that our eyes met, I felt a sense of longing, as if she were silently begging us not to go.

Zoltan had mentioned having a consort, someone whom he'd claimed to have saved. And Ben had told us that he'd left someone behind. I struggled to remember her name. . . .

"Grier?"

I didn't speak very loudly, yet Zoltan must have heard me, for he turned and looked back at me. There was a flash of anger in his eyes, and again I realized just how vulnerable we still were. Carlos must have heard me, too, because he stopped at the edge of the clearing. "What's that, honey? You say something?"

"I just saw . . ." But when I looked up again, the figure had vanished from the parapet. Like the ghost of a dead woman, seen only for a moment in the half-light of winter's day. "Never mind," I murmured. "Let's just get out of here."

So we took Susan and made our way back down Mt. Bonestell, saying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little to each other as we followed our own footprints through the forest. About halfway back, we met up with Marie; she was leading a group of men from Shady Grove, all of them armed with carbines, ready and eager to take on whatever we might have found. It took a lot of double-talk, but we managed to convince them that a posse wasn't needed. Some strange aboriginals had taken off with our girl, but they'd abandoned her after awhile, and we'd found her on the mountain. More a nuisance than anything else. Let's just go home.

We didn't tell Ben about finding Zoltan, nor did I tell him about having seen Grier. Ben had suffered enough already; he was already half-convinced that Zoltan was dead, and that the woman he'd once loved had joined him. Why rip open an old wound? At best, the knowledge that they were both still alive would have broken his heart all over again; at worst, it might have prompted him to go charging up the mountain, in the vain hope that he might be able to save her. But if that was indeed Grier, then she was beyond hope of redemption; she'd become the consort of an insane god, and there was nothing that could be done for her.

So we swore Susan to silence, and kept this knowledge to ourselves. That evening, though, after everyone had gone to bed, Carlos and I met once more with Fred LaRoux. In the quiet of the main lodge, with a fire in the hearth and drinks in hand, we came clean, telling him everything that we knew, while insisting that the *chirreep* posed no direct threat to Shady Grove. He was disturbed to learn that Zoltan Shirow was still alive, and his first impulse was to send some of his people up the mountain to find him, but Carlos and I managed to make him realize that this would probably do more harm than good. So long as they kept the gates locked at night and left him alone, Zoltan and his *chirreep* would probably leave them alone, too.

We remained in Shady Grove for a few more days, then we loaded the Scouts and Dauphins aboard the shags and began to make the long journey back to Defiance. This time, though, we didn't make the trip alone. Nearly two dozen men and women came with us, those willing and able to take up the fight against the Union. They were only the first; through the remaining months of winter, word would spread to other camps and settlements scattered across the Gillis Range, until an army was assembled for a final assault upon Liberty, the colony we'd been forced to abandon so long ago.

Yet in the end, Zoltan Shirow—*Sareech,* the mad god—was right all along. War wasn't the worst thing, and even *Corah* wouldn't have the last word. We'd seen the shape and form of spiritual slavery; only the apocalypse itself would bring salvation. O

MOVING?

Please send both your old and new address (and include both zip codes) to our subscription department.

Write to us at: Asimov's Science Fiction, Dept. NS, 6 Prowitt St., Norwalk, CT 06855-1220. Or on our website:**www.asimovs.com**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DINOSAUR SONGS

Kathleen Ann Goonan

Since the completion of her Nanotech Quartet (*Queen City Jazz, Mississippi Blues, Crescent City Rhapsody,* and *Light Music*), Ms. Goonan has been working on two new science fiction novels, *War Stories* and *This Shared Dream Called Earth.* In March, she spoke at a University of South Carolina National Space Institute-sponsored conference on nanotech, then gave a talk at Georgia Tech, and finally went to Idaho to give a plenary address to scientists and science teachers—all of which are posted at *www.goonan.com.* Since then, she has been hard at work on her fiction.

Petite Fleur was a large woman with a square jaw, unflinching green eyes, brown skin and blonde dreads. Half Lithuanian and half Nigerian, she had a sixth sense for raids.

Technically, she was thirty years old, but the time wars had by now gone on . . . well, forever. She had switched sides several times. It was hard to know what was right. The time wars were exhausting for everyone.

Along with millions of other addicts, she needed dinosaur songs.

But she was different from the rest of the addicts.

She knew where to find them, how to deliver them, how much to demand in payment.

Usually.

Now, something was wrong.

When Petite Fleur was truly petite, just a snip of a girl, as her father the famous bootlegger Dinosaur Jack used to say proudly, she already had a reputation.

She knew how to find the warps in which there were songs.

The songs of dinosaurs were astoundingly rich and sweet and complex; untranslatably strange. To hear them was to be changed forever.

She walked through a warp in the back corner of Dinosaur Jack's Traveling Irish Pub when she was three.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

Suffused with sound, struck by color, Petite Fleur danced in dinosaur time, jumped and stomped and turned somersaults. The smells of the swamp were dreadful, like the smell of her brother's poop, but the muggy air was alive with the sound of music. A creature like a giant buzzard parrot stared at her from a tree branch overhead, almost hidden within a veil of weird, huge, colorful leaves.

And then it sang.

Petite Fleur, enchanted and fearless, raised her little square-jawed face and sang back, loudly, what she had heard.

The thing launched and swooped, wings smacking the leaves, and landed next to her, bigger than Dinosaur Jack. It preened her gently with its hard bill, which felt like plastic against her arm, smooth and cool.

On the oozing ground lay one of its piebald feathers, magenta and lime. Fascinated, she picked it up and crushed its softness against her face. It stank worse than her brother. The thing opened its beak and trilled. Petite Fleur understood.

Her bones understood. Her liver understood. Her DNA and her neurons understood. Her heart swelled with love and understanding and her brain reeled, infused and imprinted with four-dimensional time. Her tears flowed.

Holding the huge feather, she danced back into the Pub, a precise point in spacetime that happened to be a deserted warehouse on 6th Street in Washington DC at three A.M. on a hot summer night, and was picked up in the raid that was in progress. Her mother, frantic at her disappearance, had waited too long to flee. Not Dinosaur Jack.

Her mother had time to sell the feather on the black market before she was charged with child abuse. Dinosaur Jack made himself scarce for a time. The social worker discovered that her new case could tell when the warps would happen and made a killing before she was arrested in a sting operation while trying to sell Petite Fleur to the mob.

Petite Fleur remembered that time as one of plenteous candy.

Dinosaurs were beautiful creatures. Graceful, covered with brilliant feathers, swift and intelligent. As soon as the warps were discovered, a few years before Petite Fleur was born, they were tapped. Dinosaurs were lured to Irish pubs. This was illegal. The songs of dinosaurs were dangerous and expensive for the country at large. The adults who heard them generally sucked money from the government for the rest of their days, useless and giddy, always on the move, neglecting to bathe or eat, always seeking the next warp.

Few children ever heard them. Respectable people did not allow their children in that kind of environment. They didn't even go there themselves.

Petite Fleur, reclaimed after a year from Child Welfare by Dinosaur Jack's well-placed bribe of ill-gotten gains, grew up in the Irish Pub underground and saw dinosaurs, and their sorry following, plenty.

She went through the warp willingly. The dinosaurs were her soulmates. They called themselves by a vibration that was untranslatable, but whenever she heard it, she felt joy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No one knew why Irish music attracted them. Perhaps the dinosaurs were on a ruthless campaign against repetitive dance music. Irish Pubs traveled from warehouse to deserted warehouse, field to field, attended by those who heard by word of mouth and the Defense Department spies who infiltrated their ranks. Fiddle music was raised against the night, dancers clogged on hastily set-up stages, drunks sang the same verses over and over and over again until the warp opened and time loosened, and beautiful, unreproduceable sound penetrated the listeners, whose dances became immediately more abstract and ecstatic. Dark, rainy back streets at midnight contrasted with freezing mountain clearings as Petite Fleur grew, and she directed them again and again to the moving place where she could get another dose of her heart's desire: dinosaur songs.

The songs of dinosaurs were jazzlike, direct from their timefreed minds. Their infinitely nuanced language, in which love and time were fused and communicated, was more richly thrilling than the trill of the nightingale. They populated their hot, tropical marsh time thickly, ebulliently, living in a social milieu far more complex than that of mere lizards or humans. They wanted only to be left in peace. They were, in fact, war protesters.

No one but Petite Fleur and Dinosaur Jack knew the secret: you had to enter the warp when you were a child.

One night when she was ten, curled in the corner of a red banquette next to a roaring drunk Dinosaur Jack in a loud and so-far warpless pub that smelled, as they all did, of stale beer, she figured out that they were in a war.

But it was not really that she figured it out. It was only that she suddenly understood it.

Sometimes she was an old lady, walking down a sleek stairway that talked to her.

Sometimes she was a young man going to war against the Turks with a Gatling gun.

Sometimes she was a pterodactyl in Mexico, and the comet streaked across the sky.

Sometimes she was choking in sun-darkening dust as she and her children starved.

Sometimes she knew that the comet was directed by enemies they thought they had escaped, transporting their DNA across the cosmos until they landed on the watery, remote planet and grew into creatures with feathers, wings, and their biologically embedded calculus of space-time. Their symbiotic companions, an essential part of their vast spacetime conversation, grew roots and fed on the planet itself.

A few of these rooted creatures, greatly altered by the struggle to live through dark and the dust, survived, albeit much-changed, the endless night that followed the crash of the comet.

They, and some dinosaurs that evolved into sparrows, nightingales, and hawks, their calculi used for the swoop and the kill and for finding their way to the ancient nesting site five thousand miles away from their summer home, were all that remained of the vast trans-time migration.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The speech of the rooted creatures no longer had anyone to receive it and it receded, only to emerge from time to time and make some humans, millennia later but only a membrane removed in true time, look like idiots.

At the Defense Department, it was rumored that dinosaurs understood mathematics far beyond those that humans could understand. If this was truly so, it would prove that mathematics was empirical. Also, it would make for the development of powerful weapons and great riches, if humanity could only grasp them.

Their songs were the only part of them that humans could really understand.

But understand was not a good word.

To hear them, for most people, was to be permanently changed.

Dinosaurs had no discernible technologies, though. Their thought was purely high and theoretical—except that some humans opined, in obscure academic publications, that dinosaur thought had actually *created* the constantly shifting warps. The warps were viewed as a function of the dinosaur mind.

The number of warps had never been counted. It was impossible. Perhaps there was only one warp, manifesting infinitely.

The Defense Department wanted, desperately, dinosaur mind, dinosaur song. The Defense Department wanted to own it, use it, and subjugate it for their own evil, greedy, grasping ends.

They thought they were powerful enough to do this.

They didn't take into account the determination of Petite Fleur to keep dinosaur songs free. Only she knew that the dinosaurs they were connecting with were anomalies, outcasts, or rebels, living away from highly developed centers where the spacefaring dinosaurs lived.

If the Defense Department ever found out about these spacefaring capabilities, Petite Marie knew that there would be hell to pay. The exploitation would never end.

For years, Petite Fleur had fed the addiction for dinosaur songs with her underground warp-raves, her Irish Music doorways to ecstasy and wonder, to a bare sweet taste of what a perfect synchronization with time might be.

But now the government wanted her; wanted to subjugate her beloved dinosaurs. She was Public Enemy Number One, her face huge in Times Square: The Woman Who Started the Time Wars, which were making everyone dizzy and which enabled tax evasion on a huge scale.

She dared not seek more warps.

She was on the run.

"We think that the dinosaurs are being used by Venezuela," said Agent Thwarp. "They want to kill large quantities of them in the past at a certain location and enhance their present-day oil capacity."

Agent Thwarp was a double agent, or maybe triple, a philosophy unto himself, but he'd run with Dinosaur Jack in the old days. This evening, he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wore a red Hawaiian shirt and khaki shorts and a big-brimmed straw hat. Rivulets of sweat worked their way down his brown, heavily creased face. He was Petite Fleur's friend. Mexico was the enemy of his professed country, but really, he worked for Mexico. Maybe.

He and Petite Fleur sat in a dark corner of a small, smoky café in South L.A. Once, a warp had been here, and that was all it took. The café would be in business forever. The hole where the shoulders of the brontosaurus smashed through the ceiling as if it were a stale cookie was a holy shrine reverently covered with duct-taped polyethylene, preserved for the Return of the Warp and for tourists.

Petite Fleur rolled a cool dread-bead between her thumb and finger, a nervous habit. She sipped her rum-and-cream, and trembled, but not from the chill of the drink. She trembled because she was addicted, and it had been too long. Sick, she had finally tried to find a warp, but some kind of counterinsurgency seemed to be closing down the warps, or at least scrambling them, so that Petite Fleur's delicate sensing-mechanism—she had no idea what it might be or how it worked—was scrambled as well. She wondered if someone like her was working on the side of the comet-slingers, in the service of the government in some grand trans-time plot.

"Be careful," Agent Thwarp told her. "Jack would be pretty pissed with me if anything happened to you. And I'd never forgive myself. I've known you since you were a baby."

She thanked Agent Thwarp, and, after he left, watched men on stage dance in spangly underwear to non-Irish music, and tried to figure out what to do.

Petite Fleur passed her days on the move, studying neurodevelopment in ratty cyber-cafés, desperate for clues. Her theory was that she had encountered the warp at a sensitive period, when her brain was growing, and had learned, on a deep biological level, how to find them again. It was like learning language. She didn't remember the process of learning to speak either. But her ability to speak was proof that the process had taken place. Her ability to find the warps was proof that she knew how. Even if she could not replicate that knowledge or pass it on.

Maybe a victory in the time wars, which would mean, in her terms, endless proliferation of dinosaur songs, had to do with mass.

The mass of music, however infinitesimal, as it infused synaptic signals. Mass as a catalyst for a very special precipitant in the post big-bang soup:

Time.

In a dusty country store in rural Alabama, a holdout against gas-convenience-food stores, Petite Fleur spied, on a high shelf, a box of candy from her childhood: Bit-O-Honey. The old man who ran the store dragged over a ladder and retrieved the dust-covered box. He hadn't noticed it before and asked an exorbitant price. Perhaps, she thought, he wanted to keep it and sell it online. She paid, though, and got back in her truck, and peeled age-fused paper off the sticky stuff.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The first taste of dreadfully stale Bit-O-Honey brought back memories of her time with the social worker, when Petite Fleur, in her innocence, knew everything, before growing up made her forget. In Mooreburg, she stopped at the town's only traffic light. The woman behind her honked her horn when the light turned green, and Petite Fleur did not notice.

In the age of the dinosaurs, the biologies of plants and animals were not separate. Trees and ferns and all manner of paleoflora and fauna spoke to one another in a sonic language.

Petite Fleur recalled a book she had read as a child, *The Secret Life of Plants,* in which it was claimed that plants responded to music in their environment.

She realized that that reaction was the last vestige of a time when trees could talk, and dinosaurs could sing, and they all lived together in a panoply of intense, ever-varying sound.

Sound that penetrated the core of their beings the way sugar infused the brain.

Songs with which they developed the warp.

It was curiosity, evolution, pure thought.

She pried paper from another Bit-O-Honey.

A policeman arrived and asked her if her truck was broken.

The dinosaurs knew what would happen to them, eventually.

They knew how terribly they would be misunderstood and demonized by humans, whom they considered evolutionarily stunted, tragically limited, small-brained and small-hearted.

They knew they would be destroyed by an asteroid, and darkness.

With this knowledge, a minuscule factor in the vast equations of the time wars changed.

For several weeks, dinosaurs swarmed through warps. In Prague, they were celebrated and lodged outside of town in the forested countryside near breweries. In Taiwan, they were studied, used to make billions of small, cheap, lifelike action figures, and consumed as delicacies, which greatly enhanced tourism. In Japan, they appeared and vanished repeatedly, causing deadly traffic pile-ups. In the United States, dinosaurs were killed on sight by anyone with a gun, their feathers confiscated by various government agencies and stolen by anyone who could get them. Their brains, on which a bounty was placed, were put in blenders and analyzed.

The dinosaurs no longer sang.

Petite Fleur felt deeply guilty. Surely it was she, by finding the warps again and again, who had given them this terrifying, paralyzing information about their future.

She stopped at a Motel 6 in Harrisonburg, Virginia. With effort born of heartbreak, she entered a state of mindfulness and stopped all thought of warps.

This was not easy.

The Defense Department was riddled with addicts.

They had nothing with which to threaten Petite Fleur, but they needed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her desperately. Of course, they knew where she was. They kidnapped and imprisoned her in a four-star hotel at Harborplace in Baltimore, where the agents managed to survive on caviar, steaks, expensive wines, and the occasional pulled-pork barbeque blow-out. Their expense accounts had been bumped up lately. Congress was going all-out in an attempt to quell the time wars.

During those weeks, there were no warps. Petite Fleur sat crosslegged on the floor in a deep trance while the agents channel-surfed incessantly and occasionally stuck her with pins, to which she did not react. Riots broke out worldwide. People needed dinosaur song, ephemeral, yet palpable as food, warmth, and clothing.

The agents did too.

Finally, they let her go.

Petite Fleur woke alone in a seedy motel on the outskirts of some small town in Montana. She had a bad headache. The only signs of the agents were an empty Beluga caviar tin, the still-running television, and a remote control tossed on the other bed. Outside, it was very cold. Her truck was in the parking lot, along with a credit card of their issue.

She had a surgeon from the dinosaur-song underground, an addict whose hands shook alarmingly, remove the homing device they had embedded in her arm.

She knew that her time, though infinitely long, was also terrifyingly short.

She had an idea.

It might work. Or she might have miscalculated. She was still only human. But there could be no turning back.

She wanted to live forever. Singing.

That might happen.

Or matter might dissolve and time might end.

That was the chance you had to take when you were caught in the time wars.

Dinosaur Jack, with his wealth and his connections and his underground slyness, dealt with the particulars.

In Africa, an army of orphans was assembled. There were millions of them, and no one noticed their migration by bus and by car and by plane. None were older than five. The camp was a crazy mess.

None of the adult caretakers knew the real reason they were there. They all thought that they were on a missionary rotation. Self-contained satellite camps, each containing thirty children, three adults, two portapotties, a tank of potable water, and a small warehouse full of disposable diapers, nutrient bars, medicines, disinfectant, gallons of glue and paint, scissors, crayons, and construction paper, surrounded an empty common ground a mile wide.

One mid-morning, without warning, the Big Stage was assembled on these grounds, brought by a caravan of trucks. Each team built its module in half an hour.

A hundred accomplished Irish bands, hastily transported to the wilds

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Liberia, set up their amps, rosined their bows, and were connected by wireless radio to the central computer with its mega-amp.

Petite Fleur, thin, hollow-eyed, and nearly at death's door from her month-long effort to elude international pursuit, walked to the center of the stage after nap time was over and picked up a microphone.

She closed her eyes.

She raised one arm.

"Dragon Reel Number Five," she whispered, and the amplified whisper swept over the clearing, into the jungle. She stomped her foot and waved her free hand. "One. Two."

When the music began, children stopped whatever they were doing, and listened.

But only for a few seconds.

Then they stampeded from their craft tables and Thinking Corners and afternoon crackers and swarmed onto the stage, pursued by angry missionaries too slow to catch them. Their laughs and shouts blended into the notes of a thousand fiddles. They began to jump up and down in time, and only the superior engineering techniques used in designing the vast stage kept it from shaking to pieces.

Dinosaurs materialized out of thin air.

Singing.

Moving the synaptic mystery of joy through spacetime into the still-growing brains of a million human children.

Opening them to multi-dimensional calculus.

Giving them receptors with which to hear the ancient speech of trees.

The missionaries plugged their ears and ran into the jungle, babbling and screaming. Dinosaur songs were against their religion. As were talking trees.

Petite Fleur felt intense joy, powerful release, and a shot of infinite-dimensional thought that just about blew her head off.

She sang.

After that, everyone lived in a new age of talking trees, singing dinosaurs, and glimpses of thought beyond the ability of most humans to understand. Only a few of them actually lived in the inner circle of dinosaur song.

The Internationally Embedded Nation of Children and their leader, Petite Fleur, for instance.

They made a vow to use their power only for good.

The horrors of the time wars receded, due to the diplomatic efforts of Petite Fleur and a few of the dinosaurs committed enough to brave the extreme distastefulness of the negotiation process. New schools were built so that all children could learn dinosaur songs and other multi-dimensional truths. The world rejoiced in knowledge. Beneficial and ecologically sound technologies flourished. Poverty vanished.

And people were nice to each other. ○

—With thanks to Sage Walker

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DAILY REPORTS

Robert Reed

The author tells us that "Daily Reports" is based loosely on his daughter's daycare situation—a woman in her home with a handful of little kids—as well as local troubles with West Nile Disease. Further inspiration came from a couple of dead crows set in a curious position that he happened to see while driving to the daycare.

There are brief scenes in this story that may be disturbing to some.

NAME: Tichelle
DATE: 4/5/81

FEEDINGS: 6 oz Polar B. Standard—8, 9, 10:30, 11:15, 12 (2X), 2, 3, 4, 4:45
DIAPERS: 9, 6 BMs—(Analysis enclosed, all norm)
SLEEP: 4 hrs, 13 min total/norm REM
PLAY: Smart links, stuffed okapi—prefers bright reds and oranges
ENHANCEMENTS: Norm
PROGNOSIS: Excellent

NEEDS/NEWS:

Tichelle had a wonderful first day. She seems to enjoy her new friends, and everybody very much likes her. Smiles and giggles all around!

Thank you for entrusting your daughter to me. As I mentioned before, I do appreciate your concerns. With their resources and large staffs, the full-care centers certainly seem to have much to offer both newborns and their working parents. While I'm just one person inside her own little house, looking after four tiny children. But you have seen my facilities, and you've studied my references. Frankly, we all know the advantages in having just a few children in one location. In all honesty, I can't imagine a better environment for Tichelle—save for inside your own home, sealed up with you.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Again, thank you. You have a lovely, lovely daughter, and she has such an easy temperament, too. Plus an appetite! (I had to change my autonurse's cleaning parameters. With *so* many diaper changes, I didn't want anyone rubbing her bottom raw.)

Tichelle
5/9/81

FEEDINGS: 8 oz Polar B. Standard—8, 9, 10, 11, 12 (X3), 1, 2, 2:45, 3:15, 4, 5
DIAPERS: 19, 8 BMs (Analysis enclosed, note microflora censuses results)
SLEEP: 3 hrs, 11 min—REM excellent
PLAY: Mr. Dodo, interactive gym were favorites
ENHANCEMENTS: Norm, save for SynGene Package 44/Tamborine. You might wish to contact your pediatrician, as a precaution.
PROGNOSIS: Excellent, as always

NEEDS/NEWS:
Tichelle had a good day! She sang and sang, even in her sleep. If you wish, I could record some portion of her dreams. It makes a wonderful addition to the baby's scrapbook!
Need food, diapers, and updated protocols for the autonurse, by Monday.
Tomorrow is payday. Thank you, in advance!

Tichelle
6/22/81

FEEDINGS: Self-feeding—(total consumption: 107 oz Polar B. Prime)
BATHROOM: 1st accident-free day! BM, urine samples shipped to physician, as requested. (Reimbursement voucher enclosed)
SLEEP: 3 hrs, 23 min—much REM
PLAY: Crawling everywhere; wrestling with Florence, Gavin; watching birds at feeder (she loves the new red birds); book-time with *Your Beautiful World* volumes
ENHANCEMENTS: Norm—(The neurological add-ons are blending nicely. Question on LackLee 14: Are these serotonin levels correct?)
PROGNOSIS: Excellent immune responses, as promised!

NEEDS/NEWS:
Another good day!
I don't know if I mentioned this before, but Gavin is very much taken by your daughter. Her appetite and rapid growth have always been subjects of fascination for him. (He will always be quite small.) But as Tichelle grows and becomes more active, he finds even more reasons to like her. (Who doesn't?)
Gavin is my oldest—nearly three now—and for the moment, he is my most communicative child. Today, for instance. He was playing with your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

daughter, trying to teach her how to say her own name. He was persistent and very sweet, saying, "Tichelle, Tichelle. I like saying Tichelle. You try it. Tichelle, Tichelle." But, of course, her mouth isn't quite ready yet. Eventually he wore her out, and she fell asleep, and little Gavin came to me, wearing this wonderful smile.

"I'll marry Tichelle," he promised me. "As soon as we're both grown up."

"Will you?" I asked.

"In another five years," he said, unaware that her growth curve is quite a bit steeper than his. "We'll both be grown up, and ready," he told me with his endearing confidence.

I thought you should know. Not even five months old, and your daughter already is breaking hearts.

Tichelle
7/31/81

FEEDINGS: 111 oz Polar B. Special, 5 Soysalm cakes
BATHROOM: Norm
SLEEP: 2 hrs, 14 min (REM—see enclosed note)
PLAY: With Gavin, many games
ENHANCEMENTS: Norm, apparently
PROGNOSIS: Fine

NEEDS/NEWS:

It was a good day, in general.

There was a rather bad nightmare, however. Which happens, and I wouldn't normally mention it. Tichelle went down for her afternoon nap and woke early, screaming. Roaring, really. But as it happens, her dreams were being recorded—my autonurse was spliced into the appropriate add-on, running tests—and I captured what awakened her, and what made her cry for most of the next half-hour.

Gavin talks to your daughter. With the best of intentions, he has tried to explain the world to her, and why she is as she is. He is quite bright, and would be even without his add-ons. And maybe I haven't been careful enough, letting him speak as he wishes. But these concepts are quite abstract, and Tichelle shouldn't be able to comprehend abstractions yet. You showed me all of the projections, and her verbal skills don't seem to exceed those wondrous predictions.

But I'm afraid she comprehends more than we realize. Watch the recording. In one sense, yes, it is a traditional monster-from-the-darkness dream. But if you notice the crude details of her monster: The changing crystalline face; the syringe-like tail; the monster's blinding speed. To me, there is one obvious explanation, and because she is so young—advanced, but only along certain avenues—Tichelle needs to be protected from unnecessary fears.

I have already warned Gavin not to talk about these matters.

"But she has to know," he told me.

"She has plenty of time to learn," I replied, with my stern voice. "Both of you have all the time in the world, darling."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tichelle
8/17/81

FEEDINGS: 90 oz Special, 11 Soysalms
BATHROOM: Norm
SLEEP: 3 hrs, 3 min
PLAY: Constant, many toys and games
ENHANCEMENTS: Norm
PROGNOSIS: Good, with concerns—(note NEWS!)

NEEDS/NEWS:

As you know, we've enjoyed our little walks during the cool of the morning. And I assure you, before we go outside, I always check the Epidemiology Network first, reading the updates and making sure there are no alerts. I never take children anywhere without protection, and then only if we are at the standard Alpha-level threat. So I had no warning. None. And really, I can't see how anything bad will come from this. But I wanted you to know.

We saw a pair of dead birds today.

On the next block, a group of boys were playing. They were grown boys, big and strong and proud of their new bodies. One boy would throw a football high in the air—higher than any tree—and my children and I watched the ball rise and rise, and then finally fall again, carried up the street by the wind.

I watched the ball hit the ground, and that's when I saw the birds. They were large and black, like old-fashioned crows. I suppose the boys had found them first, and as a joke, they set one corpse directly behind the other. It was a sick and vulgar display, and exactly in character with boys. But instead of reprimanding them, I turned us around and started straight for home.

Unfortunately, Gavin noticed the birds. He was sitting behind Tichelle in the wagon. Pointing, he said, "Canaries."

I said, "Quiet."

Tichelle repeated the word, "Canaries?"

"That's what we call them," her friend explained.

"Why?" your daughter inquired.

By then, I was misting the air and fitting masks over the children's faces. And the autonurse was calling the Health Department, as a precaution.

"Canaries were old-time birds," Gavin said through his mask. "They were little birds put in cages. People used them to see if the coast was clear."

"Coast?" Tichelle asked. "What coast?"

"I don't know," he admitted. Then he looked at me, asking, "Could you explain it to Tichelle?"

We were halfway home. Of course, I was pulling at the wagon, trying to make it move as fast as possible. "There aren't any real canaries anymore," I explained. "We just call them that."

"All the birds are new," Gavin chimed in.

"New?" Tichelle asked.

"Every year," I told her, "we make many, many new kind of birds. Out of pieces of old birds, and brand new pieces too."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I wasn't doing a good job of explaining. But frankly, I was under a fair measure of stress just then.

Yet your daughter seemed to understand.

Nodding, she said, "Like us. Like me. Canaries are?"

I said, "Yes, dear. They're a little bit like you."

"And then they grow up," she announced. "They grow up and get their always-bodies, don't they?"

Always-bodies. That was her name for them.

I didn't have the heart to tell her. And Gavin, bless him, thought to look at me first, and I shook my head, and we made it home without any ugly revelations. I did notice several of this year's little red birds in the trees, acting ill. But even if it is a new plague, there's very little risk to the children. As I explained later to Gavin, canaries and humans share very little in the way of genetics anymore. One of us is weak for the finest of reasons, allowing diseases to prosper in their cul-de-sac gene pools, while the rest of us are designed to be exceptionally, wondrously strong.

Tichelle
8/25/81

FEEDINGS, ETC: Home for the day

NEEDS/NEWS:

The news is disturbing, yes. But at least this year's strains appeared overseas, giving us a few days to make ready.

On that note: I want to take this opportunity to remind you that I am here. When you hired me in the spring, I agreed not only to care for Tichelle while you were at work, but also, should the need arise, to supply a safe house in times of severe need. I have ample stockpiles of food and pure water here. My home is equal to most public shelters, and since I care for fewer children, the likelihood of contamination is statistically reduced. Obviously, if you decide to place her in a free public shelter, I will understand. It is your right to choose what is best for your daughter. And if you should keep her with you, inside your own home . . . well, that's your right, too. The laws are perfectly clear on this issue. Although I can say, after some painful personal experience, that most people's homes are not nearly as secure as their owners choose to believe.

I am not trying to alarm or dissuade.

Obviously, I want what is best for Tichelle, and I trust you completely to make these important decisions.

(By the way. Isn't it alarming, that ugliness with the cockroaches in Amsterdam?)

Tichelle
8/26/81

FEEDINGS: 60 oz Maintenance, 12 Soysalms
BATHROOM: Norm
SLEEP: 3 hrs 55 min

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PLAY: Occasional, but distracted
ENHANCEMENTS: Norm
PROGNOSIS: See NEWS

NEEDS/NEWS:

Such an awful day.

I know you hoped for another night or two with Tichelle. Like you, I really believed we had several days before these new bugs found their way to us. But I promise, I'll keep you up to date with everything, and of course you can speak to Tichelle any time, and watch her from your home, and if you must, you can try to get a quarantine pass—although from what I have seen and heard, I doubt that any shelter will be taking new children after midnight.

Two of my own didn't come this morning, as it happens. Florence went to the private shelter up in Breckonridge, while Rikki is at home with his parents. And everybody misses them terribly.

Gavin assures me that he will help care for Tichelle. The sweet boy.

Again, don't worry. At least don't make yourself sick with your concerns. My house has been sealed since you left, and nobody but myself can leave or enter. And I won't do either unless it is absolutely necessary.

By the way:

Today, to educate and entertain, I showed the children what happens when I use the airlock. I sealed the inner door, waving and smiling, and then the radiation bath flash-cooked my robe as well as my skin-clothes. When I stepped back into the house, Tichelle giggled and pointed at me, calling me, "Shiny woman!"

"I'm old," I explained. "I got this body long ago. This is how everybody's had to look back then, honey."

I can assume that you do not have a metallic exoskeleton.

Or hasn't Tichelle ever seen a naked adult? If not, my apologies, and I hope we can find our sense of humor here.

Tichelle
9/5/81

FEEDING: Cultured beef, soysalms, banana cakes, cheese and crackers
BATHROOM: Norm (BMs frozen for future analysis)
SLEEP: 11 hrs, 2 min (out of 24)
PLAY: Norm, surprisingly
ENHANCEMENTS: Good, but autonurse needs updated protocols
PROGNOSIS: see NEWS

NEWS/NEEDS:

I'm trying to keep her informed, but at the same time, I don't want to tell her too much. Yet every night, usually three or four times, Tichelle wakes up screaming. Her nightmares are full of dying birds and adaptive phages, and I'm amazed by what she comprehends. What are you telling her when you speak to her by link-up? (Not a criticism, just an enquiry.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

July 2004

I'm relying on Gavin to show Tichelle that there is nothing to fear, that we are perfectly safe. The plagues come every year, he promises. This year just happens to be early by a month or two. "But the sickness can't come through these walls," he told his best friend. (She is twice his size now, and so pretty.) "Look out the windows," he said, pointing at the monitors on my walls. "Do you see anything bad outside?"

Of course she can't see the phages. Gifted as she is, I doubt if she appreciates how very tiny they are.

"No," she said, shaking her pretty face. "Nothing bad."

My monitors are showing digitals of better days. Of course I took that simple precaution. Otherwise, Tichelle, and all of us, would be staring at a landscape littered with the bodies of dead and rotting birds.

Tichelle
9/19/81

NEEDS/NEWS:

I understand your concerns. And yes, it remains your right. But I think we need to remember what's best for Tichelle. For her sake, all of us need to be strong and wait this trouble out.

Speaking of your daughter: She has begun to walk. I knew she was trying, but I didn't think she was making any real progress. (It is odd how some skills have been accelerated so much, while others, by design or by accident, are only a little ahead of schedule.) Anyway, I was in the kitchen, overseeing lunch, and when I came into the living room, both she and Gavin had disappeared.

They were in absolutely no danger. My house would have barred their way and warned me of trouble. I quickly found them in my bedroom. Tichelle was standing, one hand sweetly set on Gavin's head, using him to help to maintain her balance.

They were looking at the portraits that I keep on my wall, and Tichelle noticed that some of the frames were black, while others were white. "Why?" she asked.

She was looking at the oldest portraits.

Gavin knew the reason. Quietly, he said, "They are dead now."

She glanced at me with a doubting expression. I had to shrug, and nod. "I was taking care of them," I admitted. "The first year of the plagues. A lot of years ago, it was."

It hurts, just talking about it.

Again, Tichelle asked, "Why?"

"Because we didn't know how to protect them. Or anybody. The diseases came and took away a lot of people, adults as well as—"

"Why?"

What could I tell her? I tried to distract her, pointing at all the smiling faces framed with white. "You see? After the first few years, we learned enough. Grown-up people got safe new bodies, and we learned how to protect our children until they were big enough and old enough to get their . . ." I hesitated, and then remembered her term for it. "To get their always-bodies."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She nodded, as if satisfied.

"And we grow up fast," little Gavin boasted. "I'll be grown up in just two years!"

Tichelle looked down at him—it's astonishing to realize that she is almost as tall as me now—and very carefully, she removed her hand from his head.

Standing by herself, choking with frustration, she asked, "But why?"

"Why what, honey?" I asked.

She whispered something to Gavin. Something painful, and complicated, and she plainly wanted her friend to explain it to me.

The boy straightened, and with his own pain, he admitted, "She's worried about the cockroaches."

Everybody is. But I didn't say that.

"The sicknesses," he continued. "They were just supposed to kill just people. Right?"

"Angry, stupid people built the first diseases. Because they didn't like themselves, or anyone." I don't know how else to say such awful things. "They were hoping to push us into extinction, and they didn't."

"Canaries," Tichelle muttered. "Birds?"

In brief, I tried to explain. What was meant to kill humans had a hundred ways to mutate and improve itself, and when there weren't any more susceptible people, new plagues arose, killing the apes. The monkeys. And then, all mammals. The birds were next. Followed by reptiles, and amphibians, and fish.

But that's where it ended. For years and years, only one little branch of the living world was in danger: The creatures who just happened to have backbones.

"Cockroaches?" Tichelle pressed.

I had to nod, touching her lightly. "The plagues are getting worse again," I admitted.

Your daughter lost her balance just then.

She wasn't hurt. She is almost grown, but she still has a baby's flexibility and youthful bones. Then after a little cry, she started crawling back toward the living room, Gavin walking beside her with a hand resting on her broad back. And I was crying too, looking at all those faces—living and dead, all of them still so precious to me.

Tichelle
10/3/81

NEEDS/NEWS:

And now, the trees are dying.

I never thought this was possible. Even in my own worst nightmares, I couldn't imagine that these super-plagues would find pathways into every corner of the organic world. And from what I have read, only a few alarmists—crackpots, really—ever seriously brought up this grim possibility.

While the children sleep, I do nothing but watch the horrible news from around the world, and always, the Epidemiology Network. And I cry. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

experts keep claiming that the plagues—How many are there now officially? Forty thousand?—will reach some new equilibrium.

No wildfire ever burns the forest entirely bare, and it will be the same for us. There will be safe havens. The biosphere will endure, if in a shriveled and much simpler form. They say. And I hope they know their business.

But what if they are hopeless optimists?

Then we will survive regardless. Of that, I am certain. Life on Earth will cease to be organic, but there will be life. Yet until we learn how to conceive and give birth to entirely inorganic children, it looks as if Tichelle will belong to the last generation of human beings.

It is her honor, and it is my duty to protect her.

By the way, we heard you today. We heard you tapping at the airlock and the walls. Your daughter asked about the sound, and I said that it was just canaries hitting the house with their sharp bills.

I know you want what's best for your girl.

And I can appreciate how awful everything must seem today and for the visible future.

But please, don't visit again. Even with a thorough decontamination, I can't assure Tichelle's safety, or Gavin's. And while you do have some say about your daughter's life, I can't let you endanger the other little one in my life.

Tichelle
10/7/81

NEEDS/NEWS:

You can't appreciate how horrible my day has been. It hurts to say so, but I genuinely feel that you are too self-centered to understand anything that doesn't directly concern you.

First of all, I learned this morning that both Rikki and Florence have died. They were exposed to different pathogens, one after a seal failure and the other because of inadequate decontamination, and now I have to set their pictures inside awful black frames.

And then, with barely enough time to absorb that tragedy, I receive this incredible court order signed by some incompetent judge. How did you find such an idiot? Is the world outside that panicked that a person of au-

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.asimovs.com

Don't miss out on our lively forum, stimulating chats, controversial and informative articles, and classic stories.

Log on today!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thority would sign the death-sentence of a small child, just to satisfy your selfish desires?

If you take Tichelle from me, she will die.

I don't care what you claim to have in the way of equipment and precautions. It is too dangerous. It is impossible and selfish, and I wish that you would just come out and admit what you are really thinking: You can't stand the idea of your daughter growing up without you. Better to have her die in your arms than live safely in another person's very safe house.

In one sense, I pity you.

But mostly, I think that what you consider as being good, decent behavior is nothing but the self-possessed ravings of an immature mind.

Tichelle
10/11/81

NEEDS/NEWS:

Yes, I can see you standing outside. And no, I will not open the airlock.

If you must, find help. But don't go to the Haven Commission, because they know me and understand what children need. If I were you, I would approach that stupid judge who signed this criminal order. Maybe he knows some equally stupid police officers that are bored enough and have the tools necessary.

And no, I will not let you speak to your daughter again. Whatever you told her in your last conversation, it has done nothing but cause her to weep and wail, and she has worn her fingertips bloody, trying to dig her way through my walls.

Tichelle
10/12/81

NEEDS/NEWS:

I am sorry, very sorry, to have to deliver this news to you.

Tichelle died last night. The illness was swift and relatively painless, which is a very real blessing. To the best of its ability, my autonurse has studied the illness, and the tentative judgment is that she was contaminated weeks ago by a bacteria-sized particle, and after some slow growth of various benign phages, a mutation found a weakness in the protective layers around her basic metabolism.

I know that we have had our difficulties lately. Both sides, I'm afraid, have said some unkind words. But I can't be more honest when I tell you that this is all sad, and I am very sorry, and I hope you can remember your daughter always.

(As a precaution for just this kind of event, Tichelle was sealed in her own sleeping chamber. No detectable phages escaped. Following standard protocols, I incinerated her body and the contents of her chamber, including the books and stuffed dinosaurs. I will leave the ashes in a container behind the airlock's outer door. They are yours. And again, my heartfelt condolences.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

July 2004

Gavin
6/8/83

NEEDS/NEWS:

I know that I haven't been reporting as regularly or as thoroughly as you would like. But for reasons that I can only now give, I have been very busy. Consumed, we should say. In another two weeks, according to the latest estimate, the plagues will be officially declared extinct. The organic biosphere has been removed, sadly, but the nuclear detonations and gamma-ray baths have killed the last of the hibernating phages, and it will be safe again for your son to move about in the free air. (With a few precautions, of course. Always.)

He is a fine young man. I know you have missed him, and I know he misses you, and speaks about you often. As soon as he leaves my house, he will be ready for what he and I have called his always-body. In fact, he has picked it out already—a small body, bright and handsome and absolutely in keeping with his sweet personality.

But this is not my big news today.

Over these last weeks, I have been planning a wedding. Your son's wedding, to be exact.

I know this comes as a shock. Who has he lived with for nearly two years, except for me? Well, honestly, I am letting you in on a very large secret here. His girlfriend for the last two years is still living with us, in secret. I have manipulated every byte of data that leaves this house, helping to foster this illusion of one child being raised by one old woman. But Tichelle has always been here. Always out of camera sight, and always happy.

They make a striking couple, I can tell you.

"I want to be married while I'm still organic," Tichelle has informed me, on many occasions. "I want to know what it's like. Before I have to give up this body and all. You know?"

You are gaining a bright, beautiful daughter-in-law.

Gavin spends his days smiling, thinking about the coming ceremony. It will be performed by a Justice of the Peace in Old Nevada. Of course, you are invited. And when Tichelle feels it is time, she will contact her own family, inviting them as she explains a few things. She did not sicken, much less die. The ashes that they took home were made from spoiled foods and worn-out toys. It was all a ruse to keep her with me, and safe.

I expect legal troubles. But what's the worst they can do to me? Take away my license to operate a day-care center?

The happy couple will honeymoon in my own bedroom.

As you may recall, I keep pictures of my children in that room. White frames, and black, they watch over me in the night.

This morning, with one little arm thrown over his fiancé's broad shoulder, Gavin asked, "Do you want these pictures taken down? You know, before we . . . you know. . . ?"

And Tichelle just kissed him on the top of his head, and smiled.

"I'll see them if they're on the wall or in a box," she confessed. "Either way, they're in my mind. So no, leave them up. Leave them where they belong. Okay, little darling? Okay?" ○

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE RAPE OF THE TOYOTA

I feel violated
each time he inserts
meaty fingers
into my finely tuned engine.

I don't like the way
he strokes my leather interiors,
admires my profile
like he owns me
and my superior intelligence

But I am smart enough
to find my way out of the garage
and my steel exterior is stronger
than the soft pink membrane
that covers his fragile skeleton.

Most of all
he should know
that—ultimately—
I control the brakes.

—Cathy Tacinelli

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FOREST FOR THE TREES

Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Kristine Kathryn Rusch's most recent story for us, "June Sixteenth at Anna's" (April 2003), will appear in Gardner Dozois's *Year's Best Science Fiction*. Her latest novel, *Consequences* (Roc), is the third stand-alone book in the award-winning Retrieval Artist series. Ms. Rusch also writes books as Kris Nelscott and as Kristine Grayson.

On Wednesday, there were three cop cars in front of Louisa's house. On Thursday, she didn't come to school. On Friday, when she joined the smokers in the parking lot, I grinned at her as if nothing was wrong.

"Wanna cut class?" I asked.

She bummed a smoke and sucked on it like she'd been smoking all her life. Actually, when I met her a year ago, she'd never had a smoke or a drink. She'd never done anything except follow the rules which, I gotta admit, I thought was pretty boring.

"We could see the forest," I said.

She looked at me sideways and I could see she was tempted. We'd been planning to go to the forest, but no one wanted to do it on the weekend when it would be full of tourists.

Dodging tourists was part of living in Seavy Village—just like the traffic and the foggy mornings and the pounding surf in the middle of the night. People said we were lucky to grow up here, but what did they know? The town was only interesting when you came to visit. Staying was something else altogether.

"The forest, Anne?" Louisa asked, stubbing out her cigarette on the school's brick wall. "How would we get there?"

I shrugged. "Walk?"

It wasn't as strange a suggestion as it sounded. Seavy Village was only seven miles long. The high school was at the south end. The forest, as everyone was calling it, was most visible in Seaview Beach, which was a mile south of Seavy Village. In fact, most tourists thought the town of Seaview Beach was still a part of Seavy Village. But we locals knew different.

"Why the hell not?" Louisa said. She still hadn't looked at me directly. "Let me get my gym shoes from my locker."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She walked to the main door and disappeared inside the school. I smoked another cigarette and watched the buses pull up. Kids from all over the county came to Taft High. Some of them had bus rides of an hour or more. I used to think living in town was bad until I dated a guy who lived out. There was nothing to do at his place. He didn't even have neighbors for a mile in either direction.

I didn't have a lot of neighbors either—most of the folks who owned houses near us were weekenders—but there was the comfort of being in a neighborhood. And when Louisa moved in down the hill, I actually had the chance to make a friend.

She came out without her book bag. It was strange to see her without it. We were good students. We studied and everything. But class got pretty redundant, so we stayed away as much as we could.

Her Reeboks looked out of place with her dark brown pants and matching top. Louisa was one of those color-coordinated girls. You know the kind, the ones who always understood which earrings went with what shirt and who learned to carry a different purse with each outfit when they were, oh, maybe five.

I tried living like that for a week once in the ninth grade and decided it was way too much work. Sometimes I thought I wasn't meant to be a girl. I couldn't put on makeup to save my life; I usually wore jeans and a sweatshirt; and I didn't even care what my mom's best friend—who also happened to be our stylist—did to my hair.

The thing I liked best about Louisa was that she didn't try to make me just like her and she didn't hang out with me because my lack of style made her look good. She hung out with me because we could talk, and because, it seemed, she thought I was smart, which most people didn't get right away.

"You ready?" she asked, shooting a nervous look at the buses. The drivers had to report truants and tardies if they saw them. But right at that moment, they were busy making sure everyone got off the bus. They wouldn't notice us if we hurried.

"Yeah," I said, and headed out.

We took the path that led around the school. The first few blocks would be the hardest. Once we got to the beach, we'd be okay.

I'd cut class a lot of times before, and I'd never gotten caught as long as I stayed on the beach.

I didn't know what Louisa was thinking. She had her hands in her pockets and her head down. She didn't even notice the equipment moving dirt as we walked up the footpath to High School Drive.

They were breaking ground for a new movie theater—a sixplex, according to my mom, who was a real estate agent—but I'd believe it when I saw it. Nothing good ever came to this town. At least, that was what it felt like.

We didn't even get the stuff most kids considered normal—CD stores, bookstores, good clothing stores. The sixplex wouldn't open until after we graduated, so we were stuck with the Bijou that had the same movies all the time.

I took up smoking just to have something to do. It added a little thrill, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sense of adventure, a hint of bad. If I got caught, it would be a change of pace.

We crossed Highway 101 and headed down 40th to the beach access. The steps were steep and the railing had washed away in a December storm.

The wind was cold down here and the fog was so thick that the sand and the sky melded into one gray nightmare.

"I don't think we can walk down there," Louisa said, and she had a point. Whiteout conditions were dangerous. You couldn't even see the line of the surf, and you'd have no idea if a big wave or a log or something was rolling right at you. Plus you could get lost.

I squinted at the fog, as if that made things better. "Let's take back roads, then."

Back roads were almost as good as the beach, especially on foggy days. No one would be able to tell who we were or how old we were. Even a cop car passing would be concentrating on avoiding the pedestrians, not seeing if they were delinquent kids.

We were halfway up Brown's hill when I finally had the nerve to bring up Wednesday.

"You wanna talk about it?" I asked. I didn't have to clarify. Louisa knew what I meant.

She shoved her hands deeper in her pockets and walked a little ahead of me, the fog swirling around her. Our footsteps rang on the pavement, but that was the only sound except for the ocean pounding below us. Louisa wasn't going to tell me. She never did.

Still, Wednesday had been pretty bad. Three cop cars, like I said, and her mom across the street, sitting beneath our mailbox, wrapped in a sweater and crying. I stood in our living room window and watched, holding my breath most of the time.

I could see two cops inside, just their legs through the doorway, and Louisa's dad's legs too, his feet shuffling as if he were trying to get past someone and do something else. I never saw Louisa that day, and I was too scared to call.

When the third cop car showed up (and for one scary moment I thought it was an ambulance), Louisa's mom had the cops escort her back inside. She came out nearly ten minutes later, carrying a suitcase and a pillow, looking stressed, her head down as if she couldn't face the neighborhood.

That was enough for me. I got my mom and asked her if we should go down there, maybe tell the cops that Louisa had to be inside, and that she shouldn't be left alone with her dad. But my mom said getting involved would only make her dad madder if, indeed, that was the problem (*Her mother is crazy, you know,* my mom added as if that made it all better), and maybe I should think about finding a new friend.

"You think the forest is still there?" Louisa asked.

Her voice sounded rusty. We were on the downhill side of Brown's Hill, walking past the stucco mansion that kept falling apart in the rain.

"Yeah," I said. "They don't think it's going to go away until May."

We were wet by the time we crossed the bridge over the Dee River, the divider between Seavy Village and Seaview Beach. The Dee was a tidal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

river that flooded real bad in a freak storm a couple of years ago. I always went over it with caution now, afraid that I'd be on the bridge when the next freak storm hit.

The forest was another one of those freak things that made this part of Oregon a little stranger than most. It wasn't really a forest, not any more. It was the remains of a forest, hundreds of years old. The tree stumps were petrified and then buried by sand.

They reappeared every fifty years or so and only on a winter beach. Mr. Johnson said that was because there was less sand on a winter beach—the sand got washed out to sea or something in the fall, only to get put back in the summer. And some years, the years the forest came back, the sand got sucked down to some prehistoric level or something.

Not that the forest is prehistoric. It's about four hundred years old. You see, in the early 1700s there was this massive earthquake along this coast, so big that Japan got hit by a tsunami. Since Japan had a society then that recorded time and tragedies and stuff, we know the exact time the wave hit (and wiped out some villages, I guess). If you calculate backward, and do all sorts of math like wave speed and force and stuff like that, you can figure out to the minute when the earthquake hit the Oregon coast.

A whole chunk of coast fell into the ocean during that earthquake. There was a tsunami here too, and it knocked down the entire forest. The trees snapped like twigs, and the logs washed away, probably to get thrown up on some other beach, or travel inland along the rivers.

But the stumps of those trees petrified somehow. And every so often, they get uncovered, just like they were this winter. The first time in my lifetime.

When we reached Seaview Beach, most of the fog was gone. We ducked down a side road, through a housing development, and practically ran to the beach. All our caution seemed to be for nothing. Most of the houses were empty, and they shouldn't have been. This housing development was new and affordable, according to my mom. The kind of place that locals bought, even if it was on the west side of 101.

We'd nearly reached the beach access when Louisa stopped. She turned to me, her face dotted with drops from the fog, and her cheeks red from the cold.

"Maybe we shouldn't do this," she said.

"Why not?" I asked. "We're here."

"Just a feeling."

"You think someone's gonna see us?"

She peered at me as if trying to understand my question, then shook her head. "Not cops or grownups."

"Who then?"

She shrugged and turned away. "No one, I guess."

She started down the road that led to the beach access. I followed. There were no cars parked nearby, and no one in the surrounding houses.

Here, the fog bank held off to sea, a big thick cloud that could come inland at any point. If we were going to see the forest, we had to do so quickly or it might get hidden in whiteout conditions, just like we'd found on the beach farther north.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Louisa stood above the stairs that led down to the beach, her arms crossed. I passed her and took the steps two at a time—a stupid thing to do, considering they were wet and covered with sand. But I was committed, so I continued all the way to the beach itself.

"Come *on*," I said.

She glanced over her shoulder once, as if she wanted someone to stop us, and then she climbed down.

I had never been to this beach access and it took me a moment to see the forest. At first, I thought the sand was littered with an unusual number of rocks. As I got closer, I realized they were stumps, flattened and molded by the sea.

The tide was out, and the water's edge seemed very far away. Overhead, a gull cried, its sound plaintive and mournful in the still air.

Louisa stood directly behind me, so close I could feel the heat of her body.

"Oh, my god," she said. "Do you see it?"

"See what?" I asked. "The trees? They're kinda cool. I was thinking maybe we should get close to them, see what they feel like. I mean, they look like stone, but maybe they feel like wet wood—"

"No." Louisa grabbed my arm, keeping me back. "Stay here."

"Why?"

"Can't you see it?"

She was beginning to get to me. "Of course I can see it," I said. "They're right in front of me."

"Not the trees," she said. "The faces."

I squinted. Try as I might, I couldn't see any faces anywhere. "What are you talking about?"

"In the wood." She pointed with her other hand, the one that wasn't clutching my arm and cutting off the circulation. "See? On top of that one, and the side of that one. . . ."

Her voice was shaking. She actually saw faces, and it was freaking her out.

"Yeah," I said. "It's like seeing monsters in fluffy white clouds. Get over it."

But she didn't move and she wasn't letting go of me. I shook her off and walked down the sand. It was hard-packed, like a path, and the water didn't come up this far—at least, it hadn't in the last week or so. I could see all the footprints of the people who'd come before to look at the weird trees.

"Anne, please," Louisa said. "Don't go any farther."

But I was feeling tough that day. I walked deeper into the trees and finally crouched by a big flat one. I looked at its side, its sheered top, molded round by the water, and the side half-hidden by sand. I didn't see a face at all.

"It looks safe to me," I said.

"It can't be." Her voice was soft. "They're dead."

"They've been dead a long time." I didn't even try to hide my exasperation. "Any souls they have have long since gone to heaven."

"Don't mock," she said, holding up her hands in a gesture I'd never seen before. "Please come back."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And because she was so freaked, I did. I peered at her, trying to see my friend in that panicked face, those staring eyes. "What's wrong with you?"

She looked away. "Can we go now?"

"We just got here."

"I don't want to stay. I want to go to school."

"Okay," I said. "But this might be our only chance to be down here alone."

"I hope so," she said. "I really do."

I didn't see her for the whole weekend. There weren't any cop cars in front of her house, though, and her mom was back, laughing with her dad as if nothing had happened. My mom sniffed and said something about the cycle of abuse and how I should learn from it and maybe she could find me some reading material on it, and I stopped listening at that point because it sounded too much like homework.

There was a new movie at the Bijou, but Louisa didn't want to go. By Sunday, I'd seen it three times, and decided it wasn't really worth the repeat viewings. I walked down to the beach a couple of times to sneak a cigarette, and I did my homework, and when my dad wanted to see the forest late Sunday afternoon, I decided to go with him.

My dad's a strange guy. Lanky and so young looking that sometimes people ask me if he's my brother. He's like this computer whiz and he's worked at home as long as I can remember. Important people call him on the phone or e-mail him and ask him to do these impossible projects and he just does them, like it's nothing.

But because he works at home, he gets these bugs up his butt for no apparent reason. Once he took me to Cascade Head in the middle of the week because the hiking trail had opened and he'd heard that a rare wildflower was blooming up there. We never did find it, but later he told my mom that we'd done a lot of daughter/father bonding.

I thought we'd done a lot of daughter/complaining, father/placating, but I never said that to him. He'd had fun, and I guess that was enough for me.

I've always been a little protective of my dad. He never does really seem like part of the world. Which goes a long way to explain why when he asked me to see the forest with him, I didn't roll my eyes and tell him I'd already *been,* thanks. I just went.

It was creepier the second time, even though the sun was shining and the ocean glistened a pretty blue. The stumps still looked like rocks. I finally touched one and it felt like anything you found on the beach, slimy in some places, dry in others, and covered with so much sand that it just kind of clung to you.

But that uneasy feeling Louisa had sparked in me stayed, and I found myself walking through the broken forest, looking for faces.

"You seem intense," my dad said.

"You think people lived in these trees?" I asked him. "You think maybe they all died when the wave hit?"

"There's no way to know, hon," he said. "I'm sure there were some people here. A lot of Native Americans camped here in the summer."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But the quake was in the winter."

He gave me a lopsided smile, my dad's apology smile, the one he used when he had only half a piece of information and knew it. "Well, then," he said. "Your guess is as good as mine."

I was just trying to figure out what set Louisa off, and I couldn't. Maybe it didn't have anything to do with the trees. Maybe it was about the cop cars and the stuff she wouldn't talk about, the stuff that my mom said made her bad friend material.

Because my mom didn't approve of Louisa, I didn't feel like I could talk to my dad about her either. My parents shared stuff with each other, mostly everything, from what I could tell, and sometimes it made me feel like the odd person out. I didn't have anyone to share everything with, and if I told one of them, they'd tell the other, even if they weren't supposed to.

Still I tried one more time. "You think a lot of people died on this beach, Dad?"

He frowned at me—his concerned look. "What's this with you and death? Are you depressed? Do we need to talk about something? Is there something you're not telling me?"

I rolled my eyes and shook my head. "Da-ad."

"Listen, Anne, you know how precious you are to us. You know. . . ."

I knew and I stopped listening, just like I always did. Since the high school shootings started, and all the articles about stuff like that being one way kids dealt with depression (the other, apparently, being suicide), my dad would occasionally freak like this.

He was always convinced he'd missed something. I suppose that was because he usually did. He went through life missing stuff. I guess it was only reasonable to suppose he'd miss important stuff with me too. Not that I cared. If I really needed his help, I asked. Maybe I wasn't normal that way.

I'd asked this time, he'd misunderstood, and I decided not to say any more. It was okay. The way things've gone, I'm kinda glad we never talked about it. I guess there are just some things in life you don't want your dad to know.

On Monday morning, I was in my usual spot, sneaking a smoke from T. Walker, when Louisa ran over. Her hair was a mess and her shirt had an old grease stain running across the front. She'd never come to school looking like that, and it scared me.

"Anne," she said, grabbing my arm and pulling me away from the wall. "I figured it out."

"Figured what out?" I leaned backward so I could hand the cigarette back to T. Walker. He raised his eyebrows like he was as shocked at Louisa as I was, even though he probably couldn't have cared less. T. Walker didn't care about much except his smokes and his guitar. That was probably why I liked him.

"How we can save them."

"Save who?"

"The faces."

Okay. That was it. She wasn't acting like Louisa at all. Maybe some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing had happened at home, and maybe she wanted to talk about it. But this seemed like a strange way to do it.

I walked farther into the parking lot, crossing the small grass divider and going into the forbidden section where the teachers parked their cars. We could get in trouble for standing there, but were guaranteed that no other kids were going to join us.

"Louisa, there aren't any faces. I went with my dad this weekend. I didn't see—"

"You what?" She sounded like I'd committed mass murder.

"I went with my dad. He wanted to see them."

"It's not safe there, Anne. Jeez." She ran a hand through her hair. I finally realized how it got so mussed. "Didn't I tell you that?"

"It's the beach, Louisa. Of course it's not safe."

She looked at me as if I was the crazy one. "It's not the beach. It's the spirits."

"Huh?"

"The tree spirits. I'm not sure what kind they are."

"What are you talking about?"

She sighed. "Come to my house. I'll show you."

God, the first invitation and it had to come like this. Right after my mom went through one of her big rants about abuse. Less than a week after the cop cars show up for the umpteenth time.

"We got class," I said.

"Like that's important to you."

"It is," I said.

"Mr. Carlson's the only one who grades on attendance, and you don't have him until sixth period."

"We cut on Friday."

"So?"

"So—I don't know. You're being weird, Louisa."

Her entire expression changed. One minute she was my friend, and the next it was like a mask fell over her face. She nodded, then gave me the fakiest smile. "You're right. I was being weird. It's not like me. I'm sorry."

I'd never seen her do that before. The change, I mean. I'd seen the fakey smile before, usually when she was talking to some kid she didn't like, some kid who harassed her. She'd never given me that look before.

It scared me. "I didn't mean anything."

"No," she said. "You're right and I'm wrong. Every once in a while, I forget. . . ."

She let her voice trail off as she turned away from me. The smokers on the side of the building were all watching us. Had one of us raised our voice? I didn't think so, but I couldn't remember.

"Forget what?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Let's go inside. It's almost time for first period."

"I'm sorry if I said something wrong."

She gave me that fakey smile again. "Of course you didn't."

Then she started across the parking lot. I had to run to keep up. When I reached her side, I said, "You know, Louisa, maybe we should go to your house anyway. You need to change shirts."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'll take care of it." She kept walking, going even faster as if she were trying to get away from me. She got to the building before me and by the time I got inside, she was gone. I searched for her, looking in all the usual places—near her locker, in the bathroom, outside the cafeteria—and she wasn't in any of them.

She didn't show for first period, either, or for third. By then I was getting a little freaked myself. When I got into the hall in the crush between classes, I leaned against a bank of lockers and hit the speed dial on my phone.

No answer. I had dialed Louisa's cell, which made it even weirder. She usually answered her cell.

I used my address book and tried her home number. I'd put it in on a lark. I'd never had to use it before, because Louisa kept her cell with her at all times. Once I'd even called her in the middle of the night, and she'd answered. She'd been asleep, but her cell had been right there beside her, just like usual.

The phone at her house rang and rang, too.

"Problem, Miss Moore?" Ms. Silvani was watching me from the door to her room. She was our English teacher. Pretty young, according to my mother, and really woo-woo, according to my dad. What it meant to me was that she knew a lot of New Age stuff and didn't bore us with all that Christian crap, although she could explain it when she needed to.

I hung up the phone and stuffed it in my purse. "Do you know anything about tree spirits?" I asked.

She gave me a little smile. "Tree spirits?"

I nodded.

"Is this for a class?"

I couldn't lie and say it was for English because she would know. So as I nodded, I thought it through. "Extra credit in social studies."

"Extra credit? What do you need that for, Anne? Have you been skipping again?"

All the teachers, it seemed, knew I skipped whenever I felt like it. Most of them never mentioned it, the way you don't mention that someone's got really bad b.o. or toilet paper stuck to their shoes.

I shrugged. "Do you?"

"What would tree spirits have to do with social studies?" Ms. Silvani asked.

"You know that forest that just washed up?"

"Yes," she said.

"We've been talking about it, and I thought I'd do a paper on beliefs, you know. What would the Native Americans have thought. They believed in tree spirits, right?"

Ms. Silvani took a deep breath, like I'd asked her the secret of the universe. "The tribes here on the coast had their own culture and much of it has been lost."

"Okay, but—"

"The belief in tree spirits is specific to particular regions."

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't know much about Native American belief systems, I'm sorry to say, and I know even less about the local tribes. But I do know

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that European myths deal with tree spirits. That's why we knock on wood, to awaken the spirit in the tree so that it hears our wish."

"Oh," I said. This wasn't what I wanted to hear. I had to work hard at trying not to look at my watch. I knew Ms. Silvani. She could go on for hours. My mistake for asking her.

"A lot of cultures believe that if a tree dies, its spirit dies too. The Greeks said the Dryad, their version of a tree spirit, was tied into the life of her tree. If her tree got ill, so did she. Some cultures thought that destroying a tree would bring the wrath of the spirit upon them and others had no thought that trees were anything but—well, trees."

"Um, thanks," I said, hugging my books close. "I guess I should go look up the Greek stuff, huh?"

"I'd look up the local myths, if you can. There are some people in Portland who might know about the local tribes. I'd recommend that you go to the casino, but the Natives there really don't specialize in traditions. They might be able to send you to someone who does—"

"No offense, Ms. Silvani," I said, "but that sounds like too much work for a two-page paper."

She smiled. "I thought work was something you liked."

Usually. But not at the moment, not when I was trying to figure out what to do about Louisa. I'd hoped that Ms. Silvani would have given me a clue to what Louisa was talking about and—

She had. I must have looked like a light bulb went off behind my face.

"What is it?" Ms. Silvani asked.

"I, um, just figured out how to do the paper," I said.

She smiled.

"Thanks!" I waved at her and headed down the hall, as if I were going to class. The second bell rang and I waited a few minutes before going back to my locker.

The hall cleared the minute the bell rang. It went from being too crowded to being empty. I dialed Louisa's cell phone again and got no answer. I swore, my voice echoing in the empty hallway. Then I went back to my locker and got my coat.

Louisa had seen dead faces in the trees. Now she was talking about tree spirits. I didn't know what she'd been watching on TV, maybe too much *Buffy*, but I had a hunch she was about to do something strange.

And, I guessed, she told me about it so that I would stop her.

It took me longer than I thought to get home. I had to duck twice because some school buses arrived late—apparently there'd been a blockage on 101 and they couldn't get by. I didn't want anyone to report seeing me on the road.

When I got to our street, I saw that Louisa's parents' cars were gone. The house looked pretty empty. So did ours, up on the hill. The windows were open, but the lights were off inside. Dad must have forgotten to turn them on again.

I pulled my coat tighter and went to Louisa's front door. Up close the place looked kinda small. The paint was peeling on the garage side of the door, and the screen door was covered with coastal rust.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I never thought of Louisa's parents as being poor. I kinda thought they might have money. She always looked so great and had the trendiest stuff, which I never got unless I bought it myself. My mom said it made me appreciate it more. Yeah, right.

I knocked, then took my hand back as if I could take the knock back. This probably wasn't a good idea. What if her dad was here by himself? Would he get mad at me? I had no idea how this abuse thing worked except what I saw on TV, and I knew that wasn't real.

I had just started to walk away when the door opened.

"Hey," Louisa said.

I jumped.

She was standing behind the screen, looking messier than she had before. Like she was baking or something.

"I thought you were going to stay in school." At least she didn't have that fakey smile any more. But she was watching me like she didn't know me.

"I got worried about you."

She shrugged. "Now you know. I'm fine."

"I'm sorry about what I said—"

"I don't care. I'm busy. Is that all you wanted?" She'd never been that cold to me before.

"No," I said. "Whatever you wanted me to do, I'm willing." She studied me for a moment. I thought she was going to tell me to go away, and then she said, "Okay. Come on in." She pushed open the screen door. It squealed from the rust and the lack of WD40, something my dad would have done at the first hint of a squeal.

I stepped inside.

The house wasn't as dingy as it seemed outside. In fact, it was full of bright light, even though the sky was gray. I looked up. The entire ceiling was a skylight, coated with some kind of yellow that seemed to make it even brighter in there. I thought it might be unbearable on a sunny summer day.

Plants grew everywhere, climbing the wall, creeping over iron chairs, lining the window that overlooked the interior of the garage. I recognized the design of the house. There were others in the neighborhood just like it. Mom said it was a 1940's development—kind of a ranch. Only someone had covered over the walkway that led to the entrance and made it into a room.

It was cozy and it smelled green. I liked it.

"Cool," I said.

She grinned. It was the first real look she'd given me since I'd called her weird. "I was in the kitchen when you knocked," she said.

She led me past the plants and up one concrete step into what used to be the front door. This opened into the living room, which was L-shaped. A big picture window with a view of the ocean dominated the room. An old-fashioned brick fireplace sat in one corner, and the faint smell of wood smoke made it clear it was used a lot.

The kitchen was to my right. There was a pass-through window, made of wood, and then the kitchen itself, small and boxy. I thought of the big

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

modern kitchen my dad had put into our house three years ago, and wondered how anyone could cook in this thing.

It was clear someone was cooking, though. A pot of water boiled on the stove, making the room humid, and three books were open on the tiny counter.

Above the sink was another window with an ocean view. Those windows kept the place from feeling too tiny. Still, I had no idea how three people could live in such a small area.

"Okay," Louisa said, leaning up against the counter. "I'm going to tell you what I'm doing. If you don't like it, don't say anything. Just go back to school. I don't want to hear that I'm weird. I know that I am."

I nodded. Until that day, I'd never thought of Louisa as weird. She seemed pretty defensive about it, so I didn't say anything.

Louisa ran a hand through her hair. "You never asked about the cop cars."

"Yes, I did," I said, surprised at the change of subject. Did she think she was weird because her dad hit them? If my mom was right, that wasn't weird. It happened to lots of kids.

"No, you didn't. You just wanted to know if I wanted to talk about it and if I didn't, that was okay. Most other places, everyone would want to know. Why were there cop cars? What was going on? And then someone would call the social workers and they'd start the whole processing thing until they'd realize it wasn't what they thought. Although in some places, they thought it was worse."

I had no idea what she was talking about.

"My mom," she said, very carefully, "is a witch."

I shrugged. "Mine can be too."

"No," she said. "I mean it. She's a real witch."

"Like on *Charmed*?"

She rolled her eyes. "That's made-up stuff. My mom follows the Old Gods."

"Oh," I said, not knowing there were old gods.

"And sometimes she does stuff that—I don't know." Louisa shook her head. "Never mind."

"No, it's okay." I really didn't care why her dad beat her mom up, but if she needed to talk about it, I was willing to listen.

"People call the cops," Louisa said, her voice low. "And it's none of their business. She does rituals. Like when she planted the garden. On Wednesday. Our yard is fenced, you know."

"I know," I said, hoping I didn't sound as confused as I felt.

"So she thought she had the right to—" Louisa blushed.

"To?"

"It's a fertility ritual. You have to be naked." She said the words all in a rush.

"*That's* why the cops were here?"

Louisa nodded. "They took her away because they wanted her to see some counselor. She came right back. The counselor yelled at the cops, and told them they needed training in alternate religions."

"But your dad—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is used to it. He doesn't fight it any more. He just waits."

I was really surprised. Our town was so small someone usually gossiped about this kind of stuff. I had no idea why I hadn't heard anything this time.

Or maybe they all believed like my mother did.

"So," Louisa said when it was pretty clear I wasn't going to ask questions. "I looked up the trees in my mom's books."

"The trees? Oh! The trees." I had forgotten for a minute. My head was spinning with the thought of Louisa's naked mom outside (it was *cold* that day. What was she thinking?) and her dad just waiting his way through all this stuff, and the whole town thinking they hated each other when they probably didn't at all.

"Yeah. I looked them up," Louisa said, "and there's this ritual that if you do it right might set the spirits free."

"You don't have to be naked, do you?" I wouldn't do that. Not on the beach in the spring. It was always chilly on the beach.

Louisa laughed. "No. We just have to make this potion and sprinkle it on the trees and then say this stuff."

"Does it work if you don't have magic?"

"See, that's where you watch too much TV." She grabbed a wooden spoon and turned toward one of the bowls. "It's not about powers you're born with. It's something you learn. That's why it's called witch *craft*."

"So there's no good witches and bad witches?"

"Sure there is, but my mom doesn't know any of the bad witches. She doesn't have that kind of stuff around the house."

"You've done this before?" I asked.

Louisa shook her head. "Mom wanted me to, but Dad says that religion is a choice and I don't have to make any choice at all if I don't want to."

"Is he a witch too?"

"Not hardly. He's Episcopalian."

"Oh," I said again. We didn't go to church enough for me to really know the difference between the Episcopalians and the Methodists or the Baptists. All I knew was that the Catholics had Mass and a ton of rules that we Protestants didn't have.

"Do you want to help?" She didn't sound as guarded as she had before.

"I asked Ms. Silvani about tree spirits, and what would happen to them if they'd been in the forest when the earthquake hit," I said. "She said they'd be dead."

"Ms. Silvani isn't a witch."

"But she knows—"

"She dabbles, my mom says," Louisa sounded like an authority. "She doesn't really practice anything."

"You said they were dead that day."

"They looked dead. You saw it."

"No," I said. "I've looked twice. I don't see anything."

"Because you're not trained. If you were trained, you'd see it." She was stirring whatever was in the bowl. There were lots of ingredients on the tiny counter, all of them in plastic bags marked with purple marker.

"How can you tell the difference between dead and not dead?" I asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I can't," she said, and she seemed really unconcerned. I was getting uncomfortable. No wonder she was feeling strange about being called weird. Maybe if she told other kids in other towns that she knew all this stuff, they called her weird and left and made fun of her later. That's what people do.

I wouldn't. But I've seen it happen a lot.

Still, I wasn't sure I wanted to be standing there.

"Okay, but you said if they're dead, then we shouldn't do this, so I'm thinking that maybe we should wait until your mom gets home and tell her."

"I did," Louisa said. "She said it was four hundred years ago, and not my business."

"Maybe you should listen."

"To my mom? You don't listen to yours."

Okay. She had me there. But my mom didn't dance outside in the nude for a gardening ritual and specialize in magic.

"I still don't see why you think they're not dead," I said, thinking that might be the way to talk her out of this.

She poured the contents of the bowl into the pot of boiling water, and instantly a smell like flowers and freshly mown grass filled the room.

It made me sneeze.

She handed me a Kleenex, and then set the timer. The water boiled and looked very green.

"The books say that if a person kills a tree, he kills a spirit, depending on the kind of spirit."

"Yeah," I said. "Ms. Silvani said that too."

"But mostly, the spirits are immortal. They move from place to place, tree to tree, when the time comes. They act as guardians for the forests."

"They don't do a very good job," I said, thinking of all the logging that went on around here. The original forests in this part of the state were long gone.

"Well, I don't think they can do their job," she said. "They've been imprisoned since the earthquake."

"You think a person did that?"

She shook her head. "One of my mom's books says that sudden acts of God—a hurricane, a flood—can trap these spirits in the dead tree stumps. Can you imagine being stuck in the same place for four hundred years?"

A shiver ran through me. I was having trouble imagining staying in Seavy Village for another six months. I didn't want to think about being trapped inside a tree stump for eight hundred times that long.

"Now do you want to help?" she asked.

I wasn't sure. Louisa was throwing too much at me too fast.

"It's okay if you don't," she said into my silence. "I mean, I know it's weird."

"It's not weird," I lied. I didn't want to hurt her, not again.

She gave me a half smile, like she knew I was lying, but she approved anyway. "You don't have to come."

"I know," I said. "But I will."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

We finished the potion, which was like making some stupid soup no one ever heard of, and then we walked to the forest. Part of me was glad my folks didn't know what was going on and part of me was really worried. I kept thinking about all the magic stuff I'd read, from *Harry Potter* to *The Wizard of Oz*, and I knew messing with this stuff could only get you in trouble.

I had to admit I was kinda surprised nothing blew up when we put the last of the ingredients into the potion. I thought it should have smelled really bad or something, but it didn't. It kinda jelled into this liquidy gooey stuff, but that was it. I'd seen worse in the home ec class my folks made me take sophomore year.

Middle of a school day, middle of a work day, and no one was on the beach anywhere. It was drizzly too, which was probably one reason, and cold, so we were pretty bundled up.

The tree stumps were lost to the mist, and you couldn't see the ocean just beyond them. It was like we were in the remains of a ruined forest somewhere inland, and it made me wonder if these tree spirits that Louisa was so worried about had known we were coming.

What if they did something to us? What if they traded our bodies for theirs? What if we got stuck in the trees?

On the way there, I started to talk to Louisa about all of this, but she shushed me. She said thinking about problems was the worst thing you could do around magic. That was why so many spells went wrong.

So I tried to clear my mind and that didn't work. It was like trying not to think of pink elephants—suddenly they popped up everywhere. I didn't tell Louisa my fears any more, but I think she knew.

She seemed pretty quiet herself.

She was standing next to me at the beach access, her hooded raincoat hiding her face, and she would've looked like some medieval witch if the coat wasn't neon blue. She was carrying one bucket of potion. I had the other one, and it was heavy. I wished more than once on the walk here that we'd thought of a different way to carry the stuff.

She took two serving spoons out of her pocket and handed one to me. "I think we should get right in the middle of the trees, and each work in a different direction."

I thought we should go home, but I didn't say so. I guess her friendship was more important to me than I'd known until that minute. I really didn't want her to get mad at me again.

I clutched my spoon in my fist like a club and followed her through the sand-covered stumps. We got to what she thought was the middle (I thought we were a little too close to the ocean for that) and stopped. She set down the bucket of potion.

At that moment, a wave broke against the shore—a big wave, what we call sneaker waves in Oregon—and it splashed us, grabbing at her potion and trying to take it out to sea. Louisa dived for it, but I'm the one who caught it with my foot.

She got up, soaking wet, and gave me a grin. "Thanks."

I nodded, too cold and scared to talk. She slipped her hood back and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pulled open the Tupperware top on the bucket. A wisp of smoke came out and curled into the mist. I told myself it was steam, that the potion was still hot, but I had no idea how it could be after that long walk from the middle of town.

"You go north," she said. "I'll go south. But wait until I give you the signal."

"Wh-what signal?" I managed to ask.

"I'll pause and then nod at you."

"Okay." I was still gripping the spoon like a club.

Louisa dipped into her bucket and I dipped into mine. We started flinging gelatinous bubbles of potion in all directions while she recited nonsense words—at least they sounded like nonsense to me. It also sounded like she had practiced them, because she didn't slip up and when she repeated herself the words sounded the same.

The bubbles of potion landed on the stumps and stayed, or on the sand and disappeared into it. The mist backed off as if it were afraid of us, and even the ocean quieted down. I thought I smelled something old and decaying, but that might have been coming from the waves. Sometimes the ocean had a rotting scent all its own.

Louisa and I kept backing away from each other, and eventually, the only way I could tell she was still around was the sound of her voice, saying those goofy words. I was glad to hear it, so that I didn't feel like I was flinging potion all on my own.

Slowly the bucket emptied, my spoon got clotted, and the bubbles didn't fling as far. The stumps disappeared into the sand, and I had reached the edge of the forest.

I was about to ask Louisa what was next when I realized I didn't hear her any more.

I didn't hear anything any more, which really freaked me out. The coast is rarely quiet, and the beach even less so. There's always wind or traffic or the sound of the ocean pushing against the beach.

But there was nothing. It was as if someone had dropped a glass cage around me. I couldn't even feel a breeze, which just wasn't natural. There was always a breeze on this beach. Always.

My damp hair hung beside my face. The mist was still here, the drops holding their place in the air as if they'd been painted there.

Then I heard a sound. It was a creak, like a floorboard in an old house. The creak was followed by another, and another, and suddenly an entire series of creaks. Then the creaks became snaps, the snaps became bangs, and I was surrounded by faces—clear, floating faces, all of them with that surprised look that people get when they've just been awakened from a really deep sleep.

The faces swirled around me, coming at me, peering at me, and I backed up, tripping on the sand and falling against a rock. I may have screamed, or it might have been Louisa. Or maybe we both did. I don't know.

All I could think about was all those TV shows and movies where spirits floated in and out of people like light, taking them over and becoming them. What would a tree spirit do with me? Kill me for setting it free? Even accidentally?

They swirled closer and closer, hovering over me, peering into my eyes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as if they could see what got me to free them. Then they rose up and banded together, like a water funnel in a windstorm. They rose higher and higher, more of them pulling out of the stumps, until they were toweringly high, so high, I couldn't see the top.

I didn't move from my place in the cold damp sand. The faces didn't come near me now. They just kept rising and rising until there were no more coming out of the stumps.

Then they flattened themselves against the skyline, like a giant cloud that had come in too close and was going to pelt us with rain. They hovered for a moment, and a thousand eyes, maybe more, looked down at me.

I never felt so tiny and insignificant in my entire life. I cringed, still hanging onto the spoon.

Finally the faces turned away from me. The cloud swirled for a moment, then headed inland, so fast that a moment later, the sky was clear.

Even the mist was gone.

The tree stumps looked cracked and empty, blacker than they'd been, as if they weren't going to last through the winter, as if a big wind would take what was left of them and send them out to sea.

It took me a minute to find my voice. "Louisa?"

She didn't answer. Maybe they'd taken her. Ms. Silvani had said in class that some of the minor deities required sacrifices. Did the spirits look at me and decide I wasn't worthy? Was that why they stared, then flew away?

Or had they flown away because they'd looked at Louisa and knew she was the one they wanted?

I managed to get up and stagger through the decaying stumps. The sand seemed thicker than it had been, and it was hard to slog through. I finally reached the south side and saw the neon blue coat, crumpled against a rock.

It took me a minute to realize I was looking at Louisa. She was huddled there, her hands over her head, her bucket beside her, the spoon half buried in the sand.

"Louisa?" I asked.

She huddled even more.

"Louisa?" I put my hand on her back.

She looked up, startled. "Are they gone?"

I nodded. "Didn't you see? They went inland."

"Oh." She moved like an old woman, as if each muscle hurt. "I hid when the first face came at me. Did they come at you?"

"Yes."

She stared at me for a minute. I decided not to tell her the rest. About how the faces inspected me and then stared at me before swirling into a cloud and heading east.

"The forest feels different now, doesn't it?" she asked.

I nodded.

"Do you think we did the right thing?"

I sat down in the sand beside her, more tired than I cared to think about. I didn't know the answer. Maybe I was scared of the answer, just like I'd been scared of magic all along.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You said it before." I brought my knees up and wrapped my arms around them, hoping to stay warm. "How would you like to be trapped in one place for four hundred years?"

She nodded once, then smiled at me. "Thanks for coming with me," she said.

"Wouldn't have missed it for the world."

And, at the time, I was telling the truth.

So it's spring now and graduation's only two weeks away. Things here still pretty much look the same. There were cop cars at Louisa's house last week—some springtime fertility ritual gone wrong, Louisa says—and her parents are talking about moving again. Mine are wondering if they're doing the right thing, letting me hang out with a girl whose parents are so abusive they get reported to the cops every month.

The winter beach is going away. The sand's coming in with the spring tides and the trees are nearly gone. The local newspaper's full of articles about disappointed tourists and the fact that the trees might not be uncovered for another fifty years.

The paper's been full of some other things, too. Stuff about "eco-terrorists" burning logging trucks, and sabotaging logging equipment and putting up blockades that make logging roads impassable.

The strange thing is that no eco-terrorist organization is taking credit. They all say things like, "We think what happened is great. Wish we'd done it."

Louisa and I are the only ones who believe them. But we don't talk about it.

We got enough to talk about. We got accepted to four of the same colleges, all of them out East, and we're trying to decide where to go. We've decided we'll go together, so there'll be at least one familiar face, but we've also decided wherever we go, it'll be far away.

After all, who wants to stay in the same place forever? ❍

READERS: If you are having problems finding *Asimov's Science Fiction* at your favorite retailer, we want to help. First let the store manager know that you want the store to carry *Asimov's*. Then send us a letter or postcard telling us the full name and address of the store (with street name and number, if possible). Write to us at: *Asimov's Science Fiction*, Dept. NS, 6 Prowitt St., Norwalk, CT 06855-1220. Thank you!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GWENDOLYN IS HAPPY TO SERVE YOU

Eliot Fintushel

Eliot Fintushel, a past Nebula and Sturgeon nominee, has spent the last year memorizing, then staging and touring solo, the entire Book of Revelation, with masks and music. Mr. Fintushel's "Apocalypse" received critical acclaim at the Cleveland International Performance Art Festival and at The Marsh in San Francisco. Next stops: Edinburgh and Jerusalem.

I'm working the register at Pupik's, and the Professor says, wait a minute, he says, and we wait a minute. He's peeling the tinsel off a mint toothpick. He's goosing the sen-sen bowl. He's scratching the mopboard with the toe of his oxfords. And he says, give me an egg and olive to go. White bread?, I says. And he waits another minute while I beat a tattoo with my pencil. And he says, easy on the mayo, he says. That'll be three seventy-five, I says, and he goes, can I take you out to dinner? And I says, huh?

This is my husband now.

And he says it again, honest to God, which I heard it perfectly good the first time: can I take you out to dinner?

Him, he's got perfect white teeth and a sweater over his shoulders with the sleeves tied loose, like from a *Vogue*. Me, I got split ends and cellulite and a name tag which it says, "GWENDOLYN is happy to serve you."

I says, "Sure, why not?"

"When do you get off work?" he says.

"Half past four," I says, "but I gotta go home and get the smell off and fix myself up."

"No, you don't," he says. He's punching buttons on his watch. "You're perfect just like you are." Something to this effect. And before I can say nothing back—which I don't even want to, because I am totally basking—he's gone. And he never smiled at me or nothing.

I wipe down the counter. I fill the condiment station. Then it hits me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My heart starts in to pounding, and I can't get a hold of my lung. So I laugh. That's what I do. I laugh, and I says to Vinnie, the dishwasher, I says, did you get a load of that guy?

"What?" he says. "The Professor?" he says.

And I go: "Is that what he is? How do you know?"

And Vinnie goes, "Lily waited his table. You know how Lily is," he says. "She licks their chops for 'em." And he says, "What about him?"

And I tell Vinnie what the Professor done, and Vinnie shrugs. He's standing in the steam cloud at the dish machine, working his face at me. Him with them pointy big teeth. And then he says exactly what I was hoping he would say. He says, "Well, maybe he likes you."

And he says, "Anybody care if I eat the egg and olive?"

I didn't have the moose back then, but I had the tracks in my backyard where I was living. I had the tracks and the broken branches with the leaves nibbled off them and some flowers gnawed off their stems. Old Mr. Balthazar from 14D give me dirty looks, like I picked them. I mean, why would I, but that's Mr. Balthazar for you. In a word: suspenders with buttons.

Nowadays my moose, he shoves his big wet nose against the palm of my hand, and when I kiss his goiter, he stops chewing if he's chewing, and he sort of grunts and nuzzles me. It's the way a cat does that wants you to keep petting it, is how I feel.

(It's not really a goiter. It's like a chicken wattle. Only humongous.)

He's gentle as a slug. Some nights, when my professor, when he was working the trick shift, and I'd be alone in the place, I see my moose from out the pantry window and go down. I see him pull at the bark of our willow tree that we have back there. He pushes his fat lip into it and chews and chews. I see him through the willow things, those hanging things, willow hair or willow rain or whatever you call them. It was just like seeing somebody behind a waterfalls singing, is how I felt about it. You don't want to say nothing, or they'll stop. And maybe you're not even sure. You sit on the red bench and watch him. But then you have to brush through that willow rain—you can't help it—because he lifts his head toward you and moans so sweet and low.

The Professor, he is always thinking about everything I have no idea, really. Which because of this it was better him moving into my place to live, because I saw his place once and, in a word: catastrophe. He can't keep track. Me, I'm neat. It's symbiosis.

Our first date, he takes me to the movies in his friggin' Volvo. The way I feel, this is nice being with a classy guy like this, but I just want it to be over and done with and me telling Vinnie and my girlfriends all about it. All through this first date I'm Fort Gwendolyn. My skin is bricks, practically, and my lips, forget it. I haven't got a tongue. Would you?

Until. Because halfway through some French movie which nobody can even understand it because the subtitles are white-on-white, he starts in to crying. He slumps down, and he's simpering and sniffing. Then he lays down his head on where my heart is, and what can I do? It's symbiosis. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

put my arm around him, and a couple weeks later we are husband and wife. Some things are meant to be.

It's like he gets periods in his eyes, I swear it. Say, he's spooning in the cornflakes, he's all pumped up on coffee, he's eyeballing his Timex, the briefcase is flush to his shin—and he'll go limp. Just like that. He'll gush and puddle right there on the Wheaties. What am I supposed to do? I symbiose him.

A JP married us with some cheap ring that was part of the deal. It looked like it come from a Cracker Jacks. The JP, he practically ate his tongue trying to say my professor's name, which, actually, it's Alcibiades. The Professor, he don't like me to say "Alcibiades," though. "Honey" is okay by him. "Hey" is even better. And he does me the same.

Alcibiades! Can you beat it?

After the ceremony, I told my Alcy, I says, I want a ring, honey. I mean, I didn't get a shower or nothing. And the Professor, he ripped me out a blank check, honest to God, and told me go buy myself something. You would think he don't care about me. But I know different. He loves me like crazy. He needs me. It's symbiosis. This is my husband I'm talking about.

I says to Vinnie, "I was born for him."

And he says—this is Vinnie talking—he says to me: "You got a lot to give, Gwendolyn."

The dish machine must have been rumbling, because that's how we would talk private even with the waiters bumping in and out, because your voice blends, and nobody will turn his head. Vinnie talked to me out of the rumble of the dish machine, and he was my friend.

And I says, "You should hear how the Professor talks sometimes. I don't hardly understand a word he's saying. I don't even know where the words end sometimes. It could be French, practically, Vinnie. But then he gets how he needs me, and, Vinnie, I don't need no subtitles. He loves me."

Vinnie was so happy for me. Vinnie is my angel. His voice broke up, and he goes, "You deserve to be happy, Gwendolyn, and the Professor can take care of you good. It's symbiosis." Which is where I picked up that particular word. Then they needed some flatware up front, and the busboy was out sick, so Vinnie had to do it, and that was that.

A couple days later, Vinnie quit. Well, he just stopped showing up for work, and I would only see him sometimes on the bus after that, in his denim jacket and his sock cap, and his skin would be like bricks, and he didn't have a tongue. In a word: Fort Vinnie. It's too bad. We had good times, Vinnie and me. He was like one of my girlfriends, actually. My first day on the job, he asked me when my birthday was, and then, when it come, which it was eight or nine months later, he give me a box of Schraft's Assorteds like it was nothing. I could tell Vinnie anything, and he would stop what he was doing, and he would listen to me.

And then he quits Pupik's, and that's that.

It just goes to show you: friendship isn't all it's cracked up to be. Exemplae gratia, it isn't your husband.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Everything is different when the sky is black. Me, sometimes, I even take wrong turns, which I don't recognize where I am. I mean, it's the same Pupik's, it's the same Triangle Building, it's the same oak tree halfway up Glide Street on the downtown side, or whatever, but to your eyes, at night, it's the goddam moon.

Take my moose, which he only comes around at night. Take the way he lets me touch his horns. His horns, they have patches of velvet. In a word: old corduroys. A person could hardly tell, but it catches on your fingerprints. He lets me touch them, and if you want to know, they are erogenous to me.

Everything is different under the willow and that black sky. When I rub his velvet he makes a rumble. They rumble like that, your mooses, or maybe it's snoring, I don't know, and it just fills you up with the sound of it. It's completely erogenous, if you want my opinion. I'm not ashamed. When I was a kid, for Christ's sakes, everything was erogenous. And that was a kid.

I whisper to my moose. I don't care. When he's near a tree root or the red bench and I can stand on it and reach him, I whisper right in his ear. I tell him, I don't know, night things. I'll tell him, exemplae gratia, I'll tell him, "I love my professor."

My moose is sweet as everything, but he's sad, I don't know. He's sad. That rumble.

"My professor, he don't tell me nothing though," is what I whispered to my moose one time. "He mums up. Oh, Moosey, he would cry all over me and give me whatever you want and be nice to you, but his life, in a word: closed book."

One time I says to my moose, "You know what?" I says. "He's still got all his velvet." It was, I don't know, a night thing to say. "My professor, in his heart, he's all velvet. Nobody ever loved him or rubbed him or nothing but only me. A person could see it right off. But he don't tell me nothing. What should I do?"

This is the kind of things I would whisper. I know it's stupid.

And he rumbles.

My moose is all the time nibbling the willow bark, which Mr. Balthazar says, it will kill it. There's wild dogs which they paw things up and they yap and they crap, and Balthazar don't make no fuss. And they ain't even pretty. But the moose burns him up. It's that tree.

Sometimes at night I think I see Vinnie out the window. You know about windows, how, in the dark, you'll see yourself on a horn of the moon, or your credenza is in the birdbath. It's halfways a mirror. So there's Vinnie, supposedly. This has happened numerous. But you open the window to say hey—and it's nobody, or one of them dogs. He was just window glass.

That's the night for you.

So a month goes by. Did I mention, he could kiss? A month of kisses. He hardly don't talk to me, but kisses? Absolute heaven, if anybody wants to know. The best is when he's practically asleep. Actually, when he's all the way asleep. Asleep and dreaming. Gone to the world. It makes a man's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lips relax. They jelly up, and you can get some real mileage there. They're not trying to prove nothing then, is my theory. Not that I've had a lot of lovers. I never had a lot of lovers. There was a guy in high school—sweet guy, great complexion. And who am I to talk, but I didn't go for him, really. But anyway.

Anyway, my professor don't kiss much otherwise. He likes when I do him, though. Sometimes they think you're their mother, that's all, and it's normal. Ask anybody.

So, anyway, I drop into Pupik's to say hello to the girls, and they're all, "How's married life?" and "What's it like being married to a academic?" Just like I want it.

The place is dead, it's after the lunch rush, and we're sitting in the corner booth smoking and having coffees and whatnot. Some new kid is busing and wiping everything down so's the girls could kick back. On the juke box, it's an oldie: "Strange Shores." An instrumental. Some of the girls are wrapping silverware in paper napkins like we do, and me too just for auld lang syne.

There's this bubble coming up in my heart. I feel it coming, but I'm thinking, it's nothing. I'm thinking, it's like your credenza out the window at night. Wrap your flatware, Gwendolyn, is what I'm thinking, when I says, "If he didn't have an answering machine, I'd know from nothing." It just come out my mouth, and I was as surprised as anybody. My face started to get away from me.

Bonnie, this skinny kid with, you know, with the jewelry and the choker who she always makes the tips, she goes, "Answering machine?"

And I says, "Yeah, his students leave him messages." I can't get a foothold in my face. Biting your lip don't stop the twitches.

And she goes, "You mean he's having affairs already?"

"No." I says. "Who's talking about affairs?" I says, and I'm trying to remember this thing I wanted to tell them about men and lips and kissing.

And Lily, with the coif, she goes, "They're always having affairs." This is the one who uses up men like Chicklets. "I could tell he was a fast one."

And old JoAnne barks, she goes, "Oh, shush, Lily, just because he never let you get your teeth in him." Then she says to me, "Lily's jealous, Gwendolyn. I bet he don't have affairs. I bet he's crazy in love with you. He's crazy in love with you, isn't he, Gwen?"

I see JoAnne wink at them others, but the way how I'm feeling, she's still your port in a storm. "It's symbiosis," I says, a little too loud. And I says, "Them calls, it's they're going to be absent or could they ask a question about Aristotle's something-or-other or could they have an office appointment. . . ."

And Bonnie goes, "Office appointment. You see what I mean?"

Lily starts in to howling then. They're my friends. They just like to have fun.

But JoAnne says, "Let her get a word in edgewise." Lily, she spreads her acrylics on the tabletop, her new two-toned French ones, the full set, with the buffed cuticles, and she strums, and she thrums, and she shuts up.

I don't know why a person starts to cry sometimes, but, anyway, it stops Lily thrumming, and JoAnne rolls the flatware out of one of her paper

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

napkins, and she hands me the napkin, and I blow my nose. JoAnne says, "Bonnie and Lily didn't mean nothing, Gwendolyn. Everybody knows he loves you."

And I had to say, "It's just that he don't tell me nothing." I clutched my flatware then—I didn't know what I was doing—and a tine pricked my thumb. A bubble of blood come, which I licked it.

Nobody said nothing. They looked at me with hungry big eyes, which I didn't understand it, and it wasn't helping.

And I had to say, "I asked my moose, too, and he can't tell me what to do. What am I gonna do?"

They acted like they didn't hear me. It was a mistake to mention the moose. Thank God, a thing like that, people let it pass, mostly. They think it's, you know, an expression. But I saw Lily give Bonnie a look, and Bonnie gives her this look back.

He's cheating on her, was the idea.

I go to bed early. I don't want to think about nothing. I wake up in the morning, and the sun, it's all needles and chalk squeak. My professor is lumped down beside me, which it was empty last night.

I rip down the covers on him. "What do you teach? What do you teach? What do you teach?" It takes three of these here before he snorts and sits up.

"Hey, what's the matter?"

"I want to know what do you teach. And you better call me Gwendolyn."

And he goes, "It don't make no difference."

And I go, "Oh yes it does. I'm going to kill myself, honest to God, Al."

"I'm not up yet," or whatever. All of a sudden, it's Fort Professor.

I get up, and I open up my closet, and I yank out an armful of hangers of dresses and slacks and blouses and everything, and I drop them all on the bed. I pull out something nice, and I says to him, I says, "I'm going to your class today, Alcibiades."

"No, you're not. What are you, crazy?" He's shaking my beige pants suit off his head.

"Why am I crazy?" I never dressed so fast. And to the nines. Who cares about him, is my attitude.

"What do you like me for, Al?" I says. I get my nice pumps out of the closet, and a leatherette purse. "I'm stupid as shit. You think I don't know it? In a word: high school dropout."

"You can't put you in a word, Gwendolyn."

"Oh yes, I can. Stupid, loser, fat: pick one. Plus, sucker. Sucker, because I thought I could be your wife."

"You are my wife."

I almost tore the ring off my finger then, which he hadn't bought it anyway—remember?—but he only gave me a check out of his goddam checkbook, one of his goddam checkbooks, which he's got, count 'em, three. I couldn't, though. I just couldn't.

I love him so.

I threw my leatherette purse instead, my taupe leatherette purse. I shot it right in his face, and he let it hit him. You have to blink, because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it's a reflex, but except for that, he just took it. It left a mark on his forehead, and then it fell somewheres under by the chest of drawers, and he just sits there. I picked it up again. I don't know.

"What do you like me for, Al?"

"I just do."

A person could almost feel sorry for him, but I'm over it.

So I says, "Tell me everything." In a word: ultimatum.

All he says is, "You don't even know where to go."

And this is what I says to him: "Philosophy 203, Plato and Aristotle." That shut him up. And I'm pre-empting him then, and I says, "It ain't called snooping when you're a person's wife."

Up he rises. He don't care if he avalanches my wardrobe onto the floor. He sleeps in his birthday suit, by the way, and you never seen a man's pelt like this one. Exemplae gratia, on his back between the shoulders and down the fifty yard line on his belly. Everyplace but the middle of his head, it's a shag rug, practically. It's erogenous.

Crazy, huh? I pre-empt him some more: I get his beloved zipper-down drycleaner bag with his outfit in it that he wears, the French sweater and everything. This is the only way he could possibly keep his duds from getting, you know, scrofulous in the ashtray of a place he lived in before he hit my digs. It's even got his shoes in it.

I says, "Here," I says. I says, "I'll be there when you get there—214 Bunting Hall," I says.

Let him bawl, is how I feel about it. Because I hear them little back-of-the throat sounds he likes to make before the storm breaks. *Ungh! Ungh! Ungh!*

He's not the only one who's suffering.

And I slam the door. Out in the hallway, big as life, right in front of the doorslam, with me still blinking and with the veins popping all over my face and neck, it's Balthazar. Maybe he's been getting some keyhole action, is my thought, the old fart. He's staring down at me like a cat at a mouse hole. His corpus is one big wrinkle, and his eyebrows are busted phone cords with the dinky thin wires sticking out every which way.

I says, "What's your problem?"

And he says, "I know what you're doing with that moose," he says. "If the willow dies, it's your fault."

Ask me if I looked like an asshole in my beige pants suit in the middle of all these practically teenagers in Bunting goddam Hall. Which it stank with mothballs, by the way. My pants suit. I blushed up a sweat, but here's the point: I am the goddam professor's wife. Not that any of them kids notices me anyway, because every one of them is a prima donna or a prima don, which they just want everybody to look at *them.* Personally, I wouldn't give them the satisfaction.

Room 214 is a lecture hall. I'm sitting in the back of, like, it's a movie theater but with desks. On either side of myself there's a girl who is as ugly as worm tunnels in dogshit, but they're beautiful from all the makeup and money; I practically fall in love with them myself. They are accessorized to the sweet bejesus, and they each of them have a computer and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a cell phone, and one has a French beret, and the other has that sweater over the shoulders like when I first saw Alcibiades at Pupik's. In a word: rich bitch.

I wish I went to college.

I knew to take along some paper and a ballpoint pen to blend, and I took it out of my taupe leatherette purse, and I laid it down in front of me on the desk thing, and I blended. It made me stop blushing and sweating. In a word, this is what I wrote:

> "I'm working the register at Pupik's, and the Professor says, wait a minute, he says, and we wait a minute. He's peeling the tinsel off a mint toothpick. He's goosing the sen-sen bowl. He's scratching the mopboard with the toe of his oxfords. And he goes, give me an egg and olive to go. White bread?, I says. And he waits another minute while I beat a tattoo with my pencil. And he says, easy on the mayo, he says. That'll be three seventy-five, I says, and he goes, can I take you out to dinner? And I says, huh?"

Do you recognize it? Only, actually, it wasn't spellcheckered then, which now it is. I got all the way down to the part about the French movie, and then everybody got quiet, so I looked up. A person was walking out onto the stage down in front.

It was my moose.

Honest to God.

I realized: I am married to a moose. Odds are, he is a weremoose, which it has to do with the moon. These things happen. It's like a campaign button, which you see a slogan one way and a guy's face the other way. I bet those college kids saw this guy with a white shirt and wool pants and oxford shoes, which, at that time, I saw a moose. He must have he wanted me finally to see him, on account of how I threw my leatherette purse at him, and he was sorry.

How can you not love a person who he's sorry like that?

He looked so, I don't know, soulful. He pawed at the stage under by the lectern, and we all of us just had to sigh. He snorted, and he shook his wattle. Everybody took notes.

Kids asked questions, and he bellowed, and he grunted, and they took some more notes.

I was so in love. I wanted to just go and hug his wattle and rub him between the horns and feel his velvet, but I only wrote this which you already read. This is when I wrote a lot of it. You could call it a love letter.

I wished Mr. Balthazar was there. He would have stopped worrying about his tree, when a person is so beautiful and has big horns in the floodlights in the lecture hall.

I want to find Vinnie is all I want to do when I leave that place. Ain't that funny? It's like if you win the lottery, a person doesn't, first off, go redeem it—you call Aunt Minnie and everything, first off. I am going to wait till Al's got his bald spot back and his weepy eyes and his *à la Fran-*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cais sweater and no horns. In a word: I am busting with love. I can hardly find my lung, which I always start in to laughing then, even in the stupid quad. And my Alcibiades is everything to me, more than even before, because I understand it all. Which, on one side of the campaign button, he is my professor, and he marries you, and he gives you money and takes care of you and everything, and on the other side he is my moose, which he lives in your heart, blood for blood, forever. It is perfectly natural and scientific. A person isn't just one thing.

This is what I said to an individual on the bus which she happened she was sitting next to me. Out of nowhere, I says: "I mean, if I said he was just a moose, okay, ship me off to the funny farm, okay. But I'm not saying that. I'm saying he's both. A person could be both. That's how I see it. If some lab coat says, that's a human being there, Miss, well, it just shows which side of the campaign button he's looking at, don't it? This is my opinion. I mean, is this America, or what?"

And she goes, "Honey, this is America, but could you please take your purse off my lap?"

I want to find Vinnie, because Vinnie is my angel. I know I can bust through Fort Vinnie with this here. I want to tell him about all I understand and about all I feel, which I am married to a weremoose, and I love him. Maybe this is stupid, okay: but since Vinnie quit the eatery, I only seen him on buses—unless you count the window glass—so I go from bus to bus to look for him. You can only get a transfer on your first fare, so this is not cheap.

I am hours on this particular mission, and still no Vinnie, but Pupik's is a couple, three blocks from my last stop, so I trot down—and what do you know. Guess who's sitting at the counter, big as life, jawboning with JoAnne and Lily?

I see Vinnie's back through the glass door, which he is wearing the denim jacket and the sock cap like he does. He's dragging a spoon through a cup of joe. Cremora and two sugars—do I know this guy or what? I push through the door, and the bell jingles under the transom, and Vinnie turns around. He sees me, but he, just like that, he turns me his shoulder. He keeps on talking to Lily like nothing happened.

I says, "Vinnie," I says, "Vinnie, you sweetheart, ain't you glad to see me?"

And Lily says, "Sure he is, Gwendolyn. You and cirrhosis of the liver. He's glad to see you both."

And JoAnne says, "You broke his heart, Gwendolyn."

Vinnie, he don't even turn around.

I says, "What are you talking about?"

Lily, she lays her hand on Vinnie's arm. In a word: sex. And she goes, "Don't pay no attention to her, Vinnie. Gwendolyn is a married woman, now." And the way she says *married woman,* it's like she's flicking a booger.

And JoAnne says, "You better leave, Gwendolyn."

"What did I do?"

Nobody says a word. All's I hear is Vinnie's spoon scrape the china, and Lily's tits heave inside her fifty-dollar pushup bra. Till I have to just go.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What am I supposed to make of this here? I'm out the door. I'm hoofing it down Glide Street. When there's a yank on my shoulder. In a word: Vinnie.

"Don't you know what you done?"

"No," I says, "I don't know what I done. What did I do, Vinnie?"

"I'm the one who loves you, Gwendolyn."

I stop walking. I feel like a mudslide, which my heart is slushing down into my pumps. So I says to him again, I says, "What did I do, Vinnie?"

"Gwendolyn, Gwendolyn, I could eat you up, Gwendolyn."

Lily's flouncing out the screen door now. She stands on the sidewalk in front of Pupik's half a block back, and she goes, "Forget about her, Vinnie. It's no use talking to Gwendolyn. Anybody can see what she is."

And I says to Vinnie, I says, and my nose is practically in his teeth practically, and I says: "What am I, Vinnie?"

And he growls, "You're someone who married a moose."

Me and Vinnie sat down on the bench in the bus shelter, and whenever a bus come, I would wave it on by, or Vinnie would wave it on by, and we talked. And he says, "It isn't right, Gwendolyn."

And I says, "Does everybody know about Al?" Meaning Lily and them.

He clams up for a minute, and then he says, "Don't hate me, Gwendolyn. I just now told them."

And I says, "How long did you know for?"

And he says, "I found out when you found out." He says, "I was kind of, I was looking out for you." And he says to his shoes, he says, "214 Bunting Hall."

"You was following me and spying on me, you mean."

"I love you, Gwendolyn."

I waved a bus on by then.

And he says, "Gwendolyn, you shoulda known better. A moose. It isn't right." Then he waves a bus on by.

And I says to him, I says, "I love him, Vinnie."

I thought he was gonna bust with tears. He held them in like a sneeze, which they leaked out of his eyes one at a time. Men. And he goes, "Gwendolyn, tell me the truth." And he waves another bus on by. It's rush hour. And he breathes for a minute. It's getting late in the afternoon, actually, and the sun is fender level between the parked cars on the other side of Glide Street. It makes the tears down Vinnie's cheeks, it makes them sparkle. They got little suns in them. You know. Men. And I'm thinking: a person might be inclined in Vinnie's particular direction when he's like this. Even with them teeth.

And he says, "Are you a moose?"

It was like a light bulb clicked on over my head, a kajillion watts. This is what I said: "Holy God in heaven, Vinnie, I must be."

"And I love you," he says. "What the hell does that make me?" He grabbed my wrists in his hands then. He held them so hard I could feel his nails dig in, and when I pulled away it was scratch marks there and, like, an Indian burn.

But a bus come just then, which nobody waved it on by, and it stopped, and the door opened up, and good thing, too, because I wanted to go home

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and be with my Alcibiades. Whatever I am, I am the same as him, is the thought here, and I got on, and I dumped all my change in the thing, and I sat down, and if the driver asked me don't I want some change back, I don't know from it.

I am a goddam moose.

Poor Vinnie. He was really down in the dumps, and that's how I left him. I couldn't talk to him no more. How can you talk to him and tell him all your secrets if a person is helpless in love with you, and you, you're already married to somebody who you love him. You can't, that's all. In a word: adultery.

So I get home, and my Al is browsing through the fridge like he does. He don't look at me when I come in. It was a day for people not looking at me. And I come up behind him, and I throw my arms around him so's I am nuzzling behind his neck, and my hands, they're on his hairy belly, and I kiss him, and I says, "Alcy," I says, "I know."

And his heart starts in to drumming. But I hold on. And he's breathing—what?—he's breathing like a moose is what, heavy and low and full of spit. *Ungh! Ungh! Ungh!* But I hold on. If you love them, you got to.

And he says, "It was all for you." His face, it's in the dairy products. It's like, he can't look at me now.

"You come to me in the yard by the willow tree," I says. "You come to me. You sniffed around. You knew I was there. You big dope, you loved me."

He doesn't say nothing, and I says, "I'm one too."

"I know."

He turns in my arms then. He turns like a stick in a hollow, how it spins, and it rubs, and it's fire. My lips are on his lips. My hands are on his hairy back, on the small of his hairy back. We never even closed the refrigerator.

"Come away with me now."

But we hear something out the window which it turns us both around. Down there, by the willow tree and the pachysandra, Balthazar is throwing branches around and swearing up a blue streak: "You see what I mean? You see what I mean? God dammit to hell, did I say this would happen, or what? That moose of yours killed my willow tree. What the hell am I supposed to do now?" And a trowel whacks the clapboard. And branches are thrashing and splitting, which it sounds like he is tearing them apart.

And my Al, he says, "We got to go, Gwendolyn. It's getting into the fall practically, and this is no place to leave a person's antlers or to raise a calf."

And I says, "Honey," I says, "you're right. But what about your position?" I says.

And he says, "Gwendolyn," he says, "I don't care a fig about my position."

A fig, he says. This is why I love him. *A fig.* Can you beat it?

And he wouldn't let me take no toothbrush, and he wouldn't let me take no bleaching cream, and to hell with accessories, says he, or even a suitcase and underwear. He bulled out the door, and you know I charged out with him. We practically we tumbled and we flew down the stairway, three flights, clip cloppity, clip cloppity. It didn't wind me, either. I felt stronger and stronger.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We got to the front door, and my Alcy, he butted it open with his horns, double doors, which the glass shattered. Where the knobs was set, it ripped and splintered and thundered and echoed, and human people stuck their head out of all the apartment doors.

Outside, it's practically a black sky. You can hear Balthazar screaming bloody murder out back. Screaming and yelling and gurgling like an apoplectic.

Balthazar and somebody else.

I says, "Who's back there with Balthazar?" It didn't come out like I meant to. It was just grunts and sniffs. Maybe I was winded after all, is the thought. But my Alcibiades, he knows exactly what I'm talking about, and he stops in his tracks and he sniffs the air with that lovely great cabonza, and he looks so smart and so strong, honest to God, a person was never so erogenous.

But he says, "Run."

I don't get it right off, so he gives me a tug, and between the tug and the finally getting it, is when it's three wolves peeking around the corner of the building, with teeth dripping blood and with a piece of Balthazar's straw hat in one of 'em's maw. And it was Lily and it was Bonnie, and it kills me to say so, but the other one was Vinnie.

And Alcy says, "Gwendolyn, Gwendolyn, run."

They was snapping and growling. I felt so bad for Vinnie, is all I felt. It disappoints you. In a word: you thought he was your friend. Me and my Alcy, we made tracks.

Them wolves was snapping at us while we run. We hightailed it toward the woods and hills back behind the interstate. When we slowed to clear the ditch along the edge of the highway, Vinnie jumped onto Alcy's back. Lily and Bonnie, they was barking and flinging drool. A person couldn't kick them enough to keep them away, and they started into snapping at your fur where it hangs down all sweaty and pleated, like. But I could see how Alcy, he needed me, so I just let Lily and Bonnie bite and hang like calves off a tit, only it was blood they was sucking, and I run over to where Vinnie was gnawing and pawing my sweetie. I pushed at that wolf and I bit and I shook him till he lost his grip and tumbled. He landed on his back, and he had to scramble to right himself, but meanwhile my Alcy, he rammed him with his antlers.

In a word: *finito.* Vinnie yowled. It was all's he could do to pull himself down into the ditch where it was harder to butt him. When Lily and Bonnie seen what my Alcy done to Vinnie and they see him rear up to do them some of the same, they let me go. They jumped across the ditch and straight into the highway. I heard brakes screech, but if they live or if they die, I don't know, and I don't care. Vinnie, the pathetic bastard, he was mewling from the ditch: he goes, "I'm the one who loves you, Gwendolyn."

Alcibiades pressed his big wet nose into my goiter, which really it's called a bell, and we broke for the woods. We ran and we ran. A person feels so free. There was a moon, and you know how it runs along with you. It runs along with you and it goes wherever you go, no matter where anybody else is, no matter if they think it's with *them,* no matter how anybody else sees it, it's still right alongside you everyplace you run. O

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE FEAR GUN

Judith Berman

Judith Berman's short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's, Interzone, Realms of Fantasy, Black Gate,* and the anthology *Vision Quests.* Small Beer Press released her chapbook collection, *Lord Stink and Other Stories,* in 2002, and her article, "Science Fiction Without the Future," received the Science Fiction Research Association's 2002 Pioneer Award for best critical essay. Ms. Berman's first novel, *The Bear's Daughter,* will be published by Ace Books. The author blogs at *futurismic.com,* and lives and works in Philadelphia.

1

The dawn found Harvey Gundersen on the deck of his house, as it had nearly every morning since the eetee ship had crashed on Cortez Mountain. There he stood a nightly watch for the fear storms. On this last watch, though, the eetees had worn him out—an incursion at the Carlsons' farm *and* the lone raider at his own well, where the black sky had rained pure terror—and fatigue had overcome him just as the sky began to lighten. When Susan shook him awake, he jerked upright in his lawn chair, heart a-gallop.

She gripped red plastic in her hand. For an instant, Harvey was sure that his worst suspicions had proved true, and his wife had learned how to bring on the bad weather. But even as he swung up his shotgun, finger on the trigger, he saw that what Susan pointed at him was not a weather-maker, not even an eetee gun about to blast him to splat, but the receiver of their landline phone. The cord trailed behind her.

Susan's gaze riveted on the shotgun. Harvey took a deep breath and lowered the barrel. Only then did Susan say, flatly, "Your brother's calling."

"What does *he* want?"

She shrugged, two shades too casual. Harvey knew Susan and Ben plotted about him in secret. His pulse still racing, he carried the phone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the house and slid the glass door closed so Susan could not overhear. He stood where he could keep his eye on both Susan and the eetee-infested mountains.

As he slurped last night's mormon tea from his thermos, liquid spilled onto the arm of his coat. Strange that his hands never shook while he held a gun.

"Hello, Ben," he said into the receiver.

"Nice work last night, Harve," said Ben. "Good spotting. You saved some lives there, buddy."

Although Harvey knew better than to trust his brother's sincerity, he could not repress a surge of pride. "I watch the weather, Ben. I can see it coming five miles off. And I look for the coyotes. They track the eetees. They keep a *watch* on them. The coyotes—"

"Sure, Harve," Ben said. "Sure. I've never doubted it. You're the best spotter we have."

"Well, thanks, Ben." Harvey seized the moment to describe how, two days ago, the coyotes had used telepathy to trick a van-load of eetees over the edge of the road to their deaths. As long as Ben was de facto dictator of Lewis County, for everyone's good Harvey had to *try* to warn him what was happening out there in the parched mountains.

But Ben cut him off before he'd even reached the part about the eetee heads. "Harvey, Harvey, you sound pretty stressed. What about you come in and let Dr. King give you something for your jitters? You tell me all the time how jittery you get, keeping watch day and night. I'll tell you honestly I'm worried, Harve. Come in before you mistake Susan for an eetee, or do something else we'll all regret."

What a lying fuck Ben was. Ben just wanted Dr. King to trank him stupid with Ativan. If Ben were truly worried, he wouldn't force Harvey and Susan to stay out here in this horribly vulnerable spot, where Harvey was exposed to bad weather two or three times a week. *That* was what made him so jittery. But it was always Sorry, Harve, you can't expect anyone in town to just *give* you food or gasoline or Clorox, or repair your phone line when the eetees cut it, not when supplies are dwindling by the day. We all have to contribute to the defense of Lewisville. Manning your observation post—the closest we have now to the ship—is the contribution we need from *you*.

What Ben really wanted was for the eetees to rid him of his troublemaker brother. And on the day the weather finally killed Harvey, Ben would send a whole platoon of deputies out to De Soto Hill to take over Harvey's house and deck. Ben would equip *them* with the eetee weapons and tools he kept confiscating from Harvey. Can't hoard these, Harve, my men need them. *Lewisville* needs 'em.

Ben's invitation to visit Dr. King, though: Harvey couldn't afford to pass that up. Although the timing of the offer was a little too perfect. . . .

"Ben, I'd rather have a couple of deputies to spell me than a pass for a doctor visit. What about it?"

"You know how short I am of manpower." Ben sighed. "I'll work on it, but in the meantime why don't you come on in?"

"Okay," Harvey said. "Okay, Ben, I'll stop by Dr. King's. If I can get Su-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

san to stand watch for me. You know how she is these days. I don't think it's a good idea to leave the observation post that long, do you? How can you be *sure* eetees won't come in daytime?"

There was a moment of silence at the other end. Then Ben said goodbye and hung up.

Harvey swallowed a few more gulps of mormon tea, feeling the ephedrine buzz now, and returned outside for recon. First he checked the weather. No fear-clouds on the horizon that he could detect. But lingering jumpiness from last night's raid, and the scare Susan had given him on waking, might obscure an approaching front.

His video monitors showed him the view toward Lewisville, from the north and front side of the house. At this distance the town was a tiny life raft of houses, trees and grain elevators adrift on the rolling sea of golden wheat. The deck itself gave him a 270-degree view west, south and east: over the highway and the sweep of fields below De Soto Hill, and of course toward the pine-forested mountains and that immense wreck.

Harvey cast around for the Nikons, only to discover that Susan had usurped his most powerful binoculars and was gazing through them toward the mountains. Anger stirring in him, he picked up the little Minoltas. Through *them,* the world looked quiet enough. The only movement was a hawk floating across the immaculate blue sky. But Harvey never trusted the quiet. The eetees might avoid the desiccating heat of daytime, but they were always stirring around up there. Plotting the next raid. And the coyotes—

If only he could spy into those mountains as easily as the eetees' fear-storms roared into his own head.

The nape of Harvey's neck began to twitch. "Do you *see* something?" he demanded. "Are the coyotes—"

"I'm looking for Fred," Susan said coldly, without lowering the binoculars.

"Fred is gone." Now the anger boiled in Harvey's gut. "You should be watching for eetees, not pining after your lost dog."

"*Fuck* your eetees! Fred is out there somewhere. He wouldn't leave us and never come back!"

Her voice had turned flat and uncompromising, and Harvey knew one of her rages was coming on. But he could not rein in his own fury.

"If you care so much," he said, "*why did you let him loose?*"

Susan finally turned to stare at Harvey. She was breathing hard. "*I* didn't let Fred out."

"Oh, so the *coyotes* unbuckled his collar?"

Deep red suffused Susan's face. "Fuck you," she screamed, "and fuck your coyotes!" She slammed the binoculars onto the deck, she reached toward the rifle—

Harvey grabbed his shotgun and aimed. How *stupid* to leave his rifle propped against the railing, out of reach—

Susan threw the rifle onto the deck, and then the tray holding the remains of his midnight snack; she kicked over his lawn chair and the tripod for his rifle, and upended the box of shotgun cartridges he'd been packing with rock salt. "Shoot me, Harvey!" she screamed. "*Shoot me!* I *know* you want to!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harvey snatched up his rifle but did not shoot. At last Susan stopped her rampage. She stared with fierce hatred through her tangled, greasy hair, panting. "*I didn't let Fred out,* you moron. You did." Then she flung herself in her own lawn chair and picked up a tattered and yellowing issue of last summer's *Lewisville Tribune*.

The shakes took Harvey. While he waited for the waves of fever cold to recede, he gritted his teeth and said to her, "I'm going to do my rounds now. Just keep an eye out, okay, Susan? That's all I ask! Watch for *eetees,* who want to kill us and steal our water, and not for your *dead dog!*"

When she did not answer, he heaved open the glass door again and stalked into the house. Susan might as well be using a weather-maker, the way she kept terrifying him. Harvey was jumpy enough today. He had just been lucky that last night's raider had probably stolen its weather-maker from a higher-ranking eetee and wasn't skilled in its use. And by now Harvey had learned to keep his distance and rely on his rifle and sniper's night-scope. So the lightning strike of blind terror had fallen short. Harvey had caught only the peripheral shockwave—although that had been horrible enough.

Weather-maker was what Harvey called the weapon. Other people called it a fear gun. Dr. King and Joe Hansen, putting their heads together, had suggested that the gun produced (as quoted in a bulletin distributed by the sheriff's office) "wireless stimulation of the amygdala, mimicking the neurochemical signature of paralytic terror." But no one had yet been able to figure out the insides of those whorled red pendants, and no one could do with them what the eetees did, not even Harvey, who was so hypersensitive from repeated exposure that the weapon affected him even when he wasn't its target. Even when they weren't being used. (When Dr. King told him that human researchers had for years been able to produce a similar if weaker effect with a simple electrode, Harvey had, next time he was alone, checked his scalp for unfamiliar scar tissue. But if Susan or Ben had had such an electrode implanted, they had also concealed the traces well.)

Harvey unbolted the connecting door that led from the kitchen into the garage. As angry as Susan's abdication of responsibility made him, this was the opportunity he needed. She would read and re-read her *Tribune* for hours, trying to pretend that the entire last year hadn't happened.

In the garage he quickly donned his rubber gloves and plastic rain coat. He raised the lid of the big chest freezer, long emptied of anything edible, and heaved out the large tarpaulin-wrapped bundle, humping it into the pickup bed. The raider's corpse hadn't frozen yet; Harvey just hoped it had chilled sufficiently to last until he reached Dr. King.

Then he stripped off his protective gear and gave it a swift rinse with Clorox in the utility sink. On the cement floor beside the sink, still at the end of its chain, lay Fred's unbuckled collar of blue nylon webbing—a testament to Susan's lies.

Harvey fetched last night's newly scavenged eetee gun from the wheel well of his pickup, where he hoped this time to keep it hidden from Susan and Ben. Next, after checking the yard through the front door peephole, he bore the ladder outside to begin his daily inspection of the video cam-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eras, the locks and chains, the plywood boarding up their windows, the eetee cell that powered the house (one of the few perks Ben allowed them).

It hurt Harvey to think about Fred, happy Fred, the only one of them unchanged since the days before the eetees had come to Earth. When he and Susan had been happy, too, in their dream house with the panoramic view atop De Soto Hill. Fred was just one dumb, happy golden retriever with no notion of the dangers out there in the mountains. More likely the coyotes had gotten Fred than the eetees—not that it made any difference.

Sweating, his scalp twitching, Harvey made his way downhill through dry grass and buzzing grasshoppers. He righted the black power cell (how he'd had to argue with Ben to keep two), slipped on a spare adapter to reconnect the cell to his well pump, and refilled the salt-loaded booby traps the raider had sprung. All the while he searched the trampled ground for the raider's missing weather-maker, but still without success. Had the coyotes taken it? There couldn't have been bad weather without a weather-maker. . . .

Finally he was climbing the hill again, eager to return to his deck. On his deck he was king—at least, on the deck he had a chance of seeing death before it peered at *him* with its yellow, slime-covered eyeball.

He had nearly reached the house when a new sound stopped him in his tracks. A shape thrashed through the tall thistles along the driveway. Adrenaline and ephedrine together surged in Harvey's veins, making his hands tremble like grass in the breeze.

But even as he pulled the eetee gun from his waistband and clutched at his rifle with his other hand, he saw that what rustled onto the driveway was not an eetee. It was not even a demented coyote come to grin mockingly at him and then zigzag wildly away into the fields, tongue flapping, while Harvey tried in vain to ventilate its diseased hide.

"Fred!" Harvey whispered in horror. Fred dropped what he was carrying and wagged his tail.

Dust, burrs, and thistledown clung to Fred's copper-colored rump, and he smelled like rotten raw chicken. As he approached Harvey, his tail-wagging increased in frequency and amplitude until his entire hind end swung rapidly from side to side. Fred tried to nose Harvey's hand, but Harvey shoved him away with the point of the rifle.

The swellings and bare patches in the fur were unmistakable. The biggest swelling rose at the base of Fred's skull.

Just like the coyotes.

Eetee cancer, Harvey called it. Ben said that was just more of Harvey's paranoia. No other spotters had seen it.

But *their* posts—the ones still manned, anyway—lay miles further from the shipwreck.

Harvey had only one choice. It was pure self-defense.

Fred lay down and smacked his tail on the ground. His eyes pleaded as if he knew what Harvey intended. But Harvey remembered the coyotes and their gleeful eetee hunts, and he hardened his thoughts as if pummeled by stormy weather. He slipped off the safety. His finger tightened on the trigger—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Footsteps rasped behind him. He spun and found himself staring into the short, ugly red bore of another eetee gun.

"Don't you *dare* shoot Fred, you fuck," Susan hissed.

Oh, Harvey, stupid, *stupid*—the video monitors on the deck—Ben must have given her a gun, *knowing* she would someday use it—

They stood there aiming at each other. Harvey could see in her face that this time she really would do it. She was going to splatter him over Fred, and Ben would get his way at last.

The blazing July sun heated his skull like a roast in an oven. Susan's gun did not waver. Harvey willed himself to breathe.

Fred thwacked his tail another couple of times, then pawed playfully at Harvey's foot. A lump pushed up suddenly in Harvey's throat and he had to blink several times to clear his vision. In a thick voice he said, "Look at Fred, Susan! He's sick! You don't want *us* to catch it, do you? You don't want *us* to get all freaky like the coyotes, do you?"

"You," Susan said, "already have."

Bleak inspiration came to Harvey. He forced himself to drop his rifle and eetee gun, slip the shotgun from his shoulder to the ground, raise his hands. "I could take Fred to Dr. King. Maybe she would look at him."

"She's not a vet and he's not sick."

"Yes, he is! Susan, look at those tumors!"

Her gaze did flick toward Fred, growing the slightest bit uncertain. "Abscesses."

"Then he needs to have them cleaned. At least."

Something broke in Susan then. Her lip trembled. She blinked. She looked at Fred. Fred crawled toward her and wagged his tail some more. Tears began to roll down Susan's cheeks. Suddenly, unexpectedly, a wave of sympathy rushed through Harvey. He had loved Fred, too.

"What do we have," Susan said in despair, "what do we have that *she* would take in trade?"

And there it was: the first acknowledgement in months that their world had changed forever. Harvey's hands were shaking again, but he managed to gesture at the garage. Susan looked at him askance, then, gun still trained on Harvey, backed toward it. Harvey followed, though he hated leaving his guns behind. Fred lay beside them, thumping his tail.

When Susan pulled back the tarpaulin in his pickup bed, she gasped and jerked her hand back as if bitten. "Harvey, Ben will *kill* you! And me, too, you asshole!" Which was probably not just a figure of speech.

Wiping at her tears with a filthy hand, she added, "Promise me, *promise me,* Harvey, that you aren't going to hurt Fred. That you won't let *her* hurt him."

"I won't," Harvey lied, trying again to swallow the lump in his throat. "Promise *me* that while I'm gone, you'll keep watch?"

Susan said nothing, but this time Harvey felt as if she might actually do it. Donning his rain coat and gloves and now rubber waders as well, Harvey took Fred's collar out into the yard to buckle it around the dog's neck. As he urged Fred into the back of the pickup and chained him there, Fred tried to lick him in the face. Up close, the stench of carrion was enough to make Harvey gag.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two presents for Dr. King, just sitting in the back of his pickup for anyone to discover. What risks he was taking today! Harvey had survived this long by trusting his fears and keeping a close eye on the weather. By being infinitely careful. Today he was throwing all caution to the winds.

But he couldn't afford to nod off the way he had this morning. He needed Dr. King's little pills. And he couldn't let Susan keep Fred *here*.

Harvey wondered whether on his return he should just shoot Susan before she learned he'd had Fred put down. She *would* try to kill him again when she found out.

He didn't want to shoot her.

Maybe, he thought, looking at the happily panting Fred, just maybe he would turn out to be wrong about Fred's tumors. Maybe Dr. King would tell him they weren't contagious. The coyotes' fur had grown back, after all, and most of the swellings had vanished.

Or maybe that notion was just Fred trying, the way the coyotes did, to control Harvey's thoughts.

One last task before departing: Harvey picked up the thing Fred had brought home. He dropped it in his Weber. Up close, the lump of rotting eetee flesh looked like raw hamburger, had the consistency of custard, and smelled like the bottom of a Dumpster. Golden retrievers had such delicate mouths; Fred hadn't left so much as a tooth mark in it.

Sweltering in his raincoat and waders, Harvey poured on the gasoline provided by the sheriff's office. As he dropped in the match, and flames sheeted up from the charcoal bed, Fred began to bark in agitation. So he did not hear Susan's shouts until she rushed up to him waving the Nikons. "Look, Harvey! Look!"

He dropped the lid on the grill to char Fred's little present to a cinder. Then he pulled off his befouled rubber gloves, took the binocs and peered in the direction she pointed.

The highway had been dust-blown and empty for a year. Now, vehicles climbed over a rise three miles away, popping into view one after the other like an endless chain of ants: trucks, fuel tankers, humvees, and Bradleys carrying helmeted men and women. The convoy ground steadily along, heading toward Lewisville.

Susan said, almost sobbing, "It's the Army. Oh, God, Harvey, they've come to save us at last."

"Save us?" Harvey said. "*What* Army?"

2

Colonel Jason Fikes could see right away that something was fishy about the town. Since the liberation of Earth he had been traveling what was left of America—the devastated cities, the suburban wastelands dotted with grim encampments of refugees, the endless reaches of fallow farmland. The trip from Spokane, chasing the rumor of another downed ship, had been no different. They had passed mile after mile of fields grown up into weeds. At scattered houses and small towns, women

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stooped in gardens and men, shotguns in hand, sullenly eyed the convoy. Or sometimes they ran after the convoy, begging for gasoline, for medicine, for food, for rescue.

The locals' plight ought to have grown more desperate the closer he got to the mountains and the starship. Fikes had seen the classified reports from Yosemite: starving refugees reduced to eating eetees, then each other.

But when the convoy came over a rise and Lewisville itself came into view, everything changed. Weeds gave way to neat furrows of golden wheat. Cattle grazed along the streamside meadows. And in the town itself, healthy children clustered in front of well-kept houses, staring at the convoy until adults rushed to herd them inside. Yes, most of the lawns had been dug into gardens, and only a handful of vehicles seemed to be working, and the grass in front of the county courthouse was dry and yellow now; but it had been *mowed*.

You could suppose they had carefully rationed supplies since the war, that they had their own hydro dam or windmill farm. Or you could glance eastward to that mile-long wreck atop the ridge, and you could draw another conclusion.

"They've been scavenging," said young Lieutenant Briggs beside him, eager as a preacher pouncing upon evidence of fornication. "We'll have to search house-to-house."

Briggs had not seen the Yosemite reports and did not yet know the enormity of their orders. Fikes nodded wearily. "They'll try to hide as much as they can."

During the approach to Lewisville he had spotted a feral cat crouched in the roadside weeds, a pair of crows pecking at a dead owl. But no eetees had showed themselves. On this brilliant summer morning, the distant shipwreck looked no more menacing than a junked car. In Fikes' experience, though, the eetees didn't surrender and they didn't admit defeat. If even a single one had survived, sooner or later it would test his soldiers. Still, that would have to wait on more urgent tasks.

Fikes gave the order to halt in front of the courthouse. There waited a knot of local men bedecked with an arsenal of rifles, shotguns, and semiautomatic small arms. Neatly dressed and clean-shaven, they looked like Norman Rockwell banditos who'd just staged their own revolution.

Or rather, Norman Rockwell meets the Sci-Fi Channel: half of them bore red splatterguns. Eetee weapons. That would make Briggs happy. A weight descended onto Fikes' shoulders.

As Fikes climbed out of his humvee, one of the locals stepped forward. This was a lean man in a sheriff's khaki uniform and badge, with cowboy boots, a straw cowboy hat, and mirror shades to complete the ensemble. The only weapon the sheriff carried in plain view was a holstered .45.

"Howdy, folks," he drawled. "Welcome to Lewisville. I'm Ben Gundersen, Lewis County sheriff."

Fikes held out his hand. "Colonel Fikes," he said. "U.S. Army."

Sheriff Gundersen put out his own hand, and the two of them shook. "What brings you fellows to Lewisville?"

Under the circumstances, the question was an odd one. Fikes said,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Your community is in proximity to a downed enemy vessel, Mr. Gundersen. Assessing that threat and mounting an appropriate response is our immediate priority. But our long-term mission is to restore services and connect you to the outside world again."

"No offense," said the sheriff, "but with all the satellites gone, we haven't heard much news since last summer. Who's the U.S. Army taking orders from these days?"

"The president has installed a Provisional Congress until new elections can be held," Fikes said. "Meanwhile, the Army is authorized under the Public Safety Act to take charge here."

"You're talking about the U.S. President. The U.S. Congress."

"That's right," said Fikes.

One of the other banditos called out, smirking, "Didn't they nuke Washington? I thought that was one good thing come out of all this."

"Yes," Fikes said. "Washington was destroyed. Now, may I ask if you have spotted survivors from the wreck? Has your town come under attack?"

"Survivors?" Gundersen tipped his hat back and scratched his forehead. "Well, now. We shot us a few last winter. They come down near town and found we weren't easy pickings. If there're any of 'em left, they pretty much leave us alone. They'd be camped out in the mountains, I guess."

"Have you seen enemy aircraft at all? Any other vehicles?"

"I guess most of their fighters crashed with the ship," Gundersen said. "Lost their guidance systems or something. Haven't seen any recently, anyway."

"But you think they still have some?"

The sheriff shrugged, inscrutable behind mirror shades. "Could be."

Since his childhood in Baltimore, Fikes had learned there were large swaths of the U.S. where well-scrubbed white people said "gosh," "shucks," and "you bet" without irony. But this sheriff wasn't just a folksy good ol' boy. He was plain bullshitting.

Fikes had already noted that Gundersen hadn't addressed him as "sir" or "colonel," and that the pole on the courthouse lawn bore no flag.

Reluctant to take the inevitable next step, Fikes bent to read the plaque on a nearby statue of buckskin-clad men. *Explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, openers of the American West, passed through Lewis County on October 3, 1806.*

If the sheriff and his gang had been just your *posse comitatus* militia types hoping to secede from the federal government in its time of weakness, Fikes' task would have been simple. Sooner or later he'd have won over the townsfolk with liberal bribes of booze, chocolate, condoms, antibiotics, disposable diapers, toilet paper. The sheriff he would have defanged first of all; in Fikes' experience, those with a taste for power were easily seduced by another helping of the same.

But the solution to the problem this town presented would not be so easy to accomplish.

Not that Fikes' orders weren't clear or that he shrank from enforcing them. From what he had read in the Yosemite reports, from the panic still electrifying headquarters in Colorado, the rule he must now impose could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not be too draconian. It was up to him, he had been told, to ensure that nothing like the Yosemite massacres ever became necessary again.

Fikes knew, however, that he could end up as lost in a repeat of Yosemite as that hapless colonel had been. In the slaughter at Upper Pines, the Yosemite rebels had demonstrated unequivocally that human beings could wield that most dreaded of eetee weapons, the handarm of the eetee elite, the *fearmonger*. The Army, on the other hand, had never learned how to operate the weapon—had no defense against it. The rebels who had understood the weapon had all been killed. Army scientists, such as they were now, had offered only useless speculation: perhaps the ordinary silent communication of eetees was a form of telepathy; perhaps eetees operated their terrible weapon, too, with some kind of thought wave.

No one understood how eetees used the guns. How could *he* anticipate by what means human beings would acquire the skill?

But he had to anticipate it. He had to prevent it. If possible, he had to acquire the power for the Army.

At least his first items of business were clear: separating the townspeople from their eetee toys, disrupting their lines of communication, bringing them firmly under Army control.

Fikes straightened. "Mr. Gundersen, may I ask how you dispose of enemy remains?"

He thought he had pegged Gundersen, but the pride that lit up the sheriff's face surprised him. "We're real strict about that, colonel. I'll show you our health ordinances. Can't risk some kind of strange disease, I tell people. We built a special crematorium to incinerate the bodies. We use bleach to clean up anything we take from them." He nodded toward a splattergun in the waistband of one of his deputies. "We could use more Clorox, now that you mention it."

Fikes nodded. "That's all very well, Mr. Gundersen, but our scientists can't yet say what potential disease vectors would look like, how they might spread, or how they could be destroyed. I must stress that anyone in your town who's had contact with the enemy, living or dead, is required to report to us. Any items of wreckage that people have picked up *must* be turned over. That includes your weapons, I regret to say. The Army will assume the burden of protecting the town from this point onward. I have strict orders on this matter. And I do have the authority to search every house. It's a vital matter of public health."

The sheriff opened his mouth to reply. Before he could speak, Fikes said, "After you hand over your splatterguns, I believe I'd like to start by taking a look at those pickup trucks over there. Is it possible you're still running them on gasoline?"

3

The Army had kept Reggie Forrester awake all the first night with the roar of tanks and trucks and the stink of diesel exhaust, which over the last year had become unfamiliar and offensive. In the morning, he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dragged himself two blocks over to the highway and discovered that, just as he'd feared, the soldiers had moved into his warehouses. Armed sentries already surrounded them. "Move along, sir," the sentries said. Chasing him—the mayor!—off his own property. Probably Ben had suggested the location, stone bastard that he was.

Reggie headed out to learn what else was befalling his town. His dismay was only compounded. Searches and detentions had started before breakfast. "Quarantine," the Army called it, but they did not name the disease they feared.

From Bob Fisher's distraught wife, Reggie learned that soldiers had "quarantined" Bob, stolid city engineer, when he'd showed up for work. And they had abruptly confiscated the networked eetee power cells that since last winter had supplied the town with electricity and pumped its artesian wells. Municipal power shut off in mid-morning, and tap water would cease flowing once the water tower emptied.

They hadn't consulted Reggie or anyone else at City Hall, or warned the townspeople what was coming.

From Estelle Gordon, administrative secretary at the community college, Reggie heard that the Army was cleaning out Joe Hansen's lab. Everyone brought their salvage to Joe, and it sat around while he and his students figured out what it was supposed to do. That morning the Army confiscated all of it, and all of Joe's notes, and they hauled away Joe, too. But so far as Estelle had been able to determine, they hadn't taken Joe to the so-called "quarantine facility" in the junior high school. No one knew where Joe was now.

Joe's students protested his detention. Angry townspeople joined them, demanding restoration of water and power. Shockingly, the Army teargassed them and hauled the lot off to quarantine.

By afternoon, when Reggie went to lodge an official protest with Colonel Fikes, unease had rooted deep in his belly. He told himself, though, that if he didn't try *something,* he would only prove his irrelevance. Ben might be the Big Man now, savior of Lewisville, but Reggie Forrester wasn't going to allow anyone to outdo him when it came to looking after the *everyday* needs of Lewisville's citizens.

When Reggie pulled up in front of the courthouse, the soldiers first evicted him from his Ford Excursion, then confiscated it. "Contamination," they said, when they found the black disk where the engine block had been. They refused to tell him what kind, but by now Reggie was certain that the disease issue was entirely fiction. No one in Lewisville had contracted an inexplicable illness, had they? Moreover, that morning, through the fence surrounding his warehouses, Reggie had spotted soldiers *installing* eetee power cells in their humvees. He now realized these must have been the ones confiscated from the town.

At least the soldiers did not march Reggie away at gunpoint. In fact, when he indignantly identified himself as Lewisville's mayor, they led him inside to their colonel. Reggie enjoyed a moment's relief at this belated acknowledgement of his importance. The fact that the colonel now occupied Ben's office also tickled him. Ben would not like that *at all.*

But then the interview, if that was the word for it, started. The colonel

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

threatened Reggie with the ridiculous quarantine, stressing its indefinite nature. He then cited Reggie's warehouses, filled with wrecked fighters and heavy weaponry that had not yet been stripped or adapted to human use. Sweating, Reggie denied having anything to do with the contents of his warehouses. He had never touched any of it. He just rented space to people. But the colonel showed no interest in his protests.

Then Fikes suggested that detention was not inevitable. He offered Reggie an incentive for cooperation, an unspecified place in the new administration. The sort of position, Colonel Fikes said, that Reggie deserved.

Flattering. But Reggie was not naïve. The world was piss or be pissed on, and right now Reggie Forrester, sad to say, was not in a position to piss on anyone. His status had been on a dizzying downward slide since the start of the war, and now he would have to wiggle hard to avoid the hot yellow stream that gravity was pulling his way. To escape it, he'd have to make himself not just useful but *indispensable* to the new regime.

Which was fraught with its own dangers. He wondered if the colonel had interviewed Ben yet, and what incentives he might have offered Ben.

That evening, Reggie slipped through backyards to Paula's house. He was shocked to see how few people had evaded the Army's tightening net. Those who'd made it to the meeting perched on Paula's sofas and chairs and shared their news. The Army had rounded up the network of spotters guarding Lewisville, including Ben's own brother, and replaced them with their own people. The colonel had posted new rules at the county courthouse. Electricity would be down until the town was reconnected to the national grid. Drinking water would be distributed between eight and eleven A.M. at the corner of Main and Third, no other uses of water except as authorized for agricultural production. A blanket curfew would be enforced between nine P.M. and seven A.M.; no civilian was allowed on the streets during those hours for any reason at all. No assembly of more than eight civilians except under Army auspices. Reggie counted: including himself, this meeting numbered nine.

"The right to assembly," Jim Hanover fumed, "is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution!" Jim had been a lawyer.

Flora Bucholter was distraught. "Just how long will it take to hook us up to the grid? How do they think they'll be able to protect the lines? What's the *point* of taking away our electricity?"

"That salvage doesn't *belong* to the Army," said Dave Sutton, whom Ben often used to float ideas. "It belongs to the people who risked their lives bringing it back—who've fought to keep the town safe!"

That predictably set off the ever-volatile Otis Redinger. "Dave's right! We've worked hard just to survive! We've been listening to other folks on the shortwave, we know what it's like in the rest of the country. It's totally lawless. Now these people show up and say, 'We're from the government and we're here to help you—'" (that drew a chuckle) "—but they've brought their lawlessness with them. All they've done is destroy or steal everything we've fought to preserve. This is an illegal military occupation by an illegal government. We've managed to protect our community from *aliens*. Now we have to protect it from dangerous *human beings* as well!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Several people applauded this impassioned speech, and Otis's face grew red from embarrassment. But then Todd Myklebust, always a wiseass, said, "Ah, sedition. Is that right enshrined in the Constitution, too?"

For a moment the meeting lapsed into nervous silence. Otis and Todd had spoken out loud what the others had only come up to the edge of saying. Then everyone started talking at once.

Up to this point in the discussion Ben had stayed silent. That was his style: remain above the fray, the calm militia commander. Now he put down the foot rest of Paula's plush blue recliner and rocked into an upright position. The uproar stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Everyone turned to look at him.

"George," Ben said, "you've been doing some reconnaissance. Why don't you tell us what you've learned?"

Although no one would guess it to look at him, unshaven, shambling George Brainerd had once been an Army Ranger. His skills had immeasurably aided both Lewisville and Ben's wartime ascent to the top of the town's chicken-coop ladder. He was not, however, one of Ben's acolytes. (Although George had not gotten up to offer that easy chair to the *mayor,* either! Reggie was squeezed between Dave and Flora on the sectional sofa.)

Now Ben's question made George look unhappy. "Their communications equipment isn't much better than ours. I didn't see anything fancier than off-the-shelf shortwave. No cell phones and they haven't set up any dishes, so my guess is that the military hasn't launched new satellites yet. No indication of aircraft, not even a recon balloon. They may patch the lines out of Lewisville for landline service, but that'll take time."

"Until then," Ben said, "we take away their radios and they're completely isolated."

"Sure," said George, looking unhappier. "If we take away *all* of them."

"Then we eliminate them," Otis said.

"You mean *kill* them?" Flora said. "Otis, you are a bloodthirsty son of a bitch."

Otis shifted uncomfortably. "Well, probably they'd surrender long before that."

"What do we do with them when they do surrender?" George asked. "Or if they don't? What will the *Army* do when an entire battalion disappears after going to look for a downed eetee ship?"

"We could get the enemy to do the job for us," said Otis. "We could send them into a trap. Then no one would know we were involved."

"So," George said, "you want to set up your fellow human beings so aliens can kill them for you?"

Silence fell on the room. Apparently even Otis felt that sounded nasty.

Then George said, "What do you think, Mr. Mayor?"

That was, Reggie knew, an appeal for his help. Reggie was flattered. And usually persuading people to a course of action was something he liked to do, something he was good at. But tonight the power of his words was far less important than their real-world consequences. When one boat was going to sink, and you didn't know whether it would be Ben's or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Army's, you needed to make very certain you had a place on both boats.

He sighed audibly and rubbed his forehead. "I agree with George that you have to think about *the long term*. Unless we have weapons that provide a *decisive* advantage over the Army—that would allow us to keep the Army and everyone else out of Lewisville *for the foreseeable future*—all an attempt at secession will accomplish is make our situation worse."

So far, so good. No one could accuse him either of pushing for Otis's little revolt, or of siding with the evil invading Army. People were turning from Ben to Reggie. Ben looked sour but not yet angry.

"You want to hand them a petition?" Jim said. "We, the undersigned, protest your wholesale abuses of civil rights, the U.S. Constitution, and common decency?"

"Oh, sure," Reggie said. "As a first step. But we need something that will make it worthwhile for them to *negotiate—in earnest*—instead of rounding us all up. *I've* been wondering, why is the Army spending all its resources to gather up not just every last piece of eetee salvage, but nearly *every person* who's worked with it? Does anyone here believe this disease nonsense? I think instead they're *looking* for something, but they don't yet know *what it is*."

George had leaned forward and was listening intently. Flora said, "And you think that if we could figure out what that thing was, if we could find it first, it would give us an advantage in negotiations?"

"Maybe they're searching for a key that activates the fear guns," said Dave.

Jim objected, "We've been looking for it for a year and turned up squat. How do you propose we find it *now?*"

His ploy was at least half working, Reggie thought. They were listening. They were beginning to think twice. Reggie the voice of reason, Reggie the idea man. When he saw George opening his mouth to add to the discussion, he even began to hope they two could convince the others to forego the uprising altogether.

But then George abruptly shut his mouth. And Otis burst out, "Reggie's right! We *force* them to negotiate! We do it right away, while we still have *some* weapons. If we get back what they've taken, they're at a disadvantage. Look: a few hundred of them, fifteen thousand of us. Ben, they can't keep control if we don't let them—"

"No, no," Reggie said, "that isn't what I was saying—" But like Otis, Jim, Dave, Todd, and even Flora had turned back toward Ben. They looked to *Ben* to decide the fate of Lewisville.

Oh, how that burned Reggie.

And now Ben spoke. "I've heard some good points. We can't throw away the lives of our men. We do have to think about the long term. But we can't let things go on the way they're heading. We take our weapons back, we force new terms on the Army, but no big battles. That's not a winning proposition."

So that was the decision. They fell to planning how they were going to break into Reggie's warehouses. Reggie had a physical sensation of sliding uncontrollably down the hen house ladder toward the guano at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bottom. And here he had thought the Army's arrival might make Ben a little circumspect.

To ensure his own survival, he had to get rid of Ben one way or the other. But how to do so safely? He couldn't simply go to Colonel Fikes and report tonight's meeting. For one thing, Reggie had made no secret of his afternoon visit to the colonel. Ben would be keeping a close eye on Reggie now.

It was amusing to imagine Ben sweating at hard labor in "indefinite quarantine," somewhere deep in a government reservation with nothing but sagebrush and jackrabbits for a hundred miles in every direction. It was considerably less amusing to contemplate what Ben might do to avoid such a fate. A bullet, say, speeding into Reggie's back from out of the shadows. Such things had happened in the last year.

At last Ben concluded the meeting by saying, "Now, folks, we've got to be off the streets before curfew. Be careful going home."

Reggie left with George through the back door. Jim Hanover followed them. They skulked along the shadows between Paula's raspberry patch and the Fortescues' pole beans. Far away, a coyote yipped into the chill of evening.

"Good try," George said to Reggie in a low voice.

Wondering why George had suddenly dropped his opposition to the ridiculous plan, Reggie glanced back at him. That was why, framed in Paula's candlelit kitchen window, he saw Ben and Otis talking. Otis appeared to be very excited. So Ben had a second, *secret* plan, one catering to Otis's enthusiasms.

"It wasn't good enough," said Reggie.

George went his own way, but Jim followed Reggie silently home, saying goodbye only at Reggie's front door. Jim's own darkened house stood across the street. Jim would now, Reggie thought, keep watch through his windows. Another of Ben's deputies was no doubt already guarding Reggie's back door.

4

Annoyed, but not wanting to argue in the hearing of the security guard, Anna King buzzed George Brainerd into the morgue corridor. George was discreet and sympathetic to her work. But she preferred no witnesses, and no interruptions.

She waited to finish the last careful slice exposing the *corpus minutalis*—so she had named the organ, in honor of its resemblance to hamburger—before she buzzed George through the door of the autopsy room as well.

"Pee-yoo!" said George, and then, shambling closer to peer over her shoulder, "Holy shit, doc, that's fresh kill."

The sight of him kindled anticipatory warmth on Anna's skin. Pavlovian conditioning. She firmly ignored it and turned away to pick up her digital camera. "Yes," she said, snapping photographs of the *minutalis,*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"and I want to keep working on it while it still *is* fresh. You know how fast they deteriorate. Now, what's so important that it can't wait until morning? Haven't our Army friends instituted a curfew, and doesn't it start in about five minutes?"

"I was kinda hoping I could stay here." He grinned at her.

"You'll be cold."

"Not my idea of romance, either," said George. "The drawers are a bit small for two people."

He almost made her smile. At the same time—it must be fatigue that rendered her so vulnerable—his words caused her throat to constrict. Did he really think their trysts in empty hospital rooms, never the same one twice, deserved the term *romance?*

The glass partition on the far side of the table reflected its own judgment: herself brown-haired and petite, neat in her spotless lab coat and face mask; him in unkempt flannel shirt and baggy jeans, face unshaven, hair uncombed. At least today he wasn't sporting his usual assortment of firearms.

They had nothing in common outside of bed. She still felt awkward saying his given name. Her sleeping pill, was how she thought of him. Since the starship had crashed on Cortez Mountain, it was either George, Ambien, or a long wakeful night in the morgue.

"Doc," he said, staring down at her prize specimen. He rocked back and forth on his heels. "This isn't the best time to have an eetee in your morgue."

She picked up her scalpel again. "What, is the sheriff on the warpath?"

"Ben—fuck no, it's the Army you should worry about."

"They've been here already," she said, beginning to sever the major nerves leading from the *minutalis* to the brain proper.

"*Here?* In the *morgue?*"

"We gave them a tour of the hospital today. Don't look so horrified. They didn't unzip any body bags, and they were kind enough to give us diesel to run our generators. Is that all you came here about?"

George was still rocking on his toes. Usually he stayed relaxed, even irreverent, under the worst of circumstances. "Ben wants to know if we can have some kind of strong narcotic, like in a hypodermic or something."

"What are you boys up to now?" she asked, but she didn't expect an answer. She knew such little favors were the quid pro quo that enabled George to keep Ben from shutting down her research altogether. Still, she wondered if the timing of this particular request should give her cause for hesitation. Even she had noticed the discontent abroad in Lewisville.

"I can give you some Fentanyl. But I'll have to get it from upstairs. Is tomorrow morning soon enough?"

"Sure," said George. "I guess."

But he showed no sign of leaving. She thought she had made it clear that she had no time for him tonight. Unfortunately, she could not rely on the eetee itself, sliced open from sagittal crest to cloacal canal, to drive him away. Such sights and smells did not disturb George.

Anna leaned over the table for better access to the left posterior pseudothalamic nerve. It required concentration to sever cleanly, running

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as it did through a layer of tough and slimy dura. Naturally George chose that moment to pick up one of her scalpels and prod at the section of skin and skull she had sawed out for access to the creature's brain stem. The mucous that protected a live and healthy eetee's skin had dried to a hard, yellowish crust. As George poked at it, a flake of the crust dropped onto the table.

"Get your hands away!" Anna said. "You aren't even wearing gloves!"

He pressed on the flake with the scalpel, crumbling it, and frowned. "Doc, I've handled a lot of dead ones in the last year. I've been covered in splat. I've had 'em keel over on top of me and vomit in my face. If they were going to make me sick, wouldn't it have happened already?"

They had discussed this topic before, but today there was a new, speculative tone in George's voice. "You're wondering about the Army's quarantine regulations?" she asked. Again George did not answer. "Well, perhaps they're justified—in principle. There are plenty of diseases with a long incubation period, and if you didn't know what to look for, you couldn't spot the infection."

"As you've said. AIDS. And mad cow disease."

"Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob," she corrected.

"And kuru."

Surprised he had heard of an obscure disease of New Guinea cannibals, Anna glanced up. George had been doing a little research on his own? She knew George wasn't stupid, despite his unkempt, sometimes goofy persona. In his own way, he was one of the smartest people in Lewisville.

"But those are hard to catch," George said. "A quarantine wouldn't have much effect. And no one here has been eating any eetee brains." Then he reverted to form. He poked at the *minutalis,* making it quiver like Jello, and grinned again. "Sure looks like it would cook up good on a grill, though."

Anna had not eaten dinner. The image was unfortunate. Her mouth watered and her stomach grumbled. She sliced away the last of the dura, and at last was able to slip her gloved hand beneath the *minutalis* and lift it onto the scale.

One-point-five-four kilos. A middling weight. From the accounts of Ben's deputies and her own labors here, she had become convinced that variation in the size of this particular organ correlated with social or military rank. The eetees with the very largest *minutalis* were always the ones carrying the fear guns and directing the others. Her first theory had been that the *minutalis* manufactured dominance pheromones, but then she had begun to wonder about the magnetic anomalies, and the odd rabbit-ear deposits of metallic compounds in the sagittal crest—

George tapped his scalpel on the metal table. "Doc, we haven't talked about it in a long time—have you or Joe Hansen made any progress on how the eetees use the fear guns?"

"Oh, sure," she said, removing the *minutalis* to a tray under the hood. She started to wash it down with ethanol. "Molecular microwave transmitters. Proteins with encapsulated crystalline segments, manufactured inside specialized neural tissue. That's how the eetees communicate with each other, too."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What?" The stark astonishment in his voice made her turn. "Have you said anything about this to *anyone else?*"

"I'm being sarcastic, George," she said crossly.

"But you have a theory."

"Guesses. Flights of fancy. I'm not a neurochemist or a molecular biologist, or for that matter a physicist, and I don't have the resources—"

"But you have evidence—"

"Nothing worth the name."

George gazed down at the eetee. "Too bad we couldn't ever bring you a live one and do the CAT scan thing. See what lights up when they do different things."

"No, on that particular idea I'm in complete agreement with the sheriff."

The last thing in the world Anna wanted was a live eetee to experiment on. She did not even like George in her morgue. She wanted it cold, silent, and stark, filled only with her well-tended garden of the dead. She wanted to keep dissecting her specimen, taking it apart organ by organ, slice by tiny slice, protein by protein. Over the dead she had total control.

But she also wanted George to stay. She wanted to touch his warm flesh and feel his hands on her own skin. It was the only thing these days that made her feel like a human being.

"What's really on your mind, George?" she asked.

"Doc," he said, "I know you aren't going to like this. You need to clean out your lab. Tonight. Get rid of your friend here. Destroy all your samples and slides. Remove all your files. Hide them—incinerate them."

"Don't be ridiculous," Anna said.

"It's not Ben you're dealing with anymore. The Army is confiscating everything that came out of that ship—"

"So I've heard. They want the goodies for themselves."

"They are also quarantining anyone who's worked with eetee goodies, and anyone who's had contact with eetees dead or alive."

"Not to mention anyone who protests the policy," Anna said. "It's not a real quarantine, George. If the Army was serious about an outbreak, the first people they would isolate would be those with the greatest exposure. And that's you deputies."

"I disagree that they're not serious," George said. "They are extremely serious. And very soon someone will tell them about Dr. Anna King and how she trades pharmaceuticals for eetee corpses in good condition. How you have a whole fucking eetee *research project* down here."

"I keep a very clean lab," Anna said. "They can check it if they want. I can't believe the Army could be *less* sensible than the sheriff on the subject of basic research."

"Oh, yes, they could be," said George. "You know, don't you, that Joe *and* all of his files have disappeared?"

Anna had heard, but she'd dismissed it as a wild rumor. The thought of ignorant soldiers ransacking her lab, her refuge, her life—destroying a year of work—terrified and enraged her. She tried to push the thought away. "I'm happy to share everything I've learned, though I'm sure people

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elsewhere with better equipment have found out a whole lot more than I have."

"Suppose," George said, "sharing is not the goal. Suppose they want to know everything you've learned, and then make sure *no one else* ever sees that information."

"But what could they possibly want to conceal? It's not as if the eetees are a secret!"

"Look," said George, "the Army comes here, to an enemy crash site, but instead of going after the eetees, they devote all their manpower and attention to *this*—whatever it is. It's important, a real disease, a—a real *something*. Maybe they don't know exactly. Maybe they know the symptoms but not the cause—maybe they don't know whether it's a disease or an effect of eetee technology. But whatever this quarantine is about, for them it is taking precedence over everything else. They *are serious about it*."

Anna tried once more to dismiss George's arguments. She found she could not. She gazed wistfully at the *minutalis* and her waiting culture plates. "Well, then," she said, at last, "I suppose I should take a look at Harvey Gundersen's dog."

"*His dog?!*"

"Harvey claims the dog has an eetee disease." Anna grimaced. "That the coyotes have it, too, and they have developed not just dementia but telepathic powers. Yes, I know what it sounds like—but today he brought in the dog, and it does have some odd lumps. I said I'd do biopsies and what blood work I have the facilities for."

"You have it *here?* Jesus, Anna, get rid of the dog, get rid of the eetee. *Now!* I'll help you. They *will* come here. Your only hope is to make sure they aren't ever able to pin this on you. Trading drugs is only a nasty rumor. You have never dissected an eetee."

"No, George. If the dog really has an eetee disease, it needs studying and I need to tell the colonel whatever I can find out. If people are in danger from it, I'd be criminally irresponsible not to!"

"You are not listening to me," George said. "They will take your notes and your little jars and they will take you away, too, and if I'm right they'll take you so far away I will never see you again."

"That's melodramatic."

"Anna," he said, taking hold of her shoulders. "Please." It was a violation of their unspoken protocol. He never touched her when she was working. The warmth of his hands percolated all the way through her lab coat and sweater. She held her own messy hands away from him.

The thing about George, the thing that had made the whatever-it-was between them possible, was that he never seemed scared. Now he was showing his fear. She didn't like it. She certainly didn't want George to know what *she* felt: how terrified she had been since the eetees had come. How, maybe, she loved him. That would be making the emotions real. That would be letting a live monster into the morgue.

She said, coolly, "Suppose Harvey Gundersen is even halfway right? You'd be asking me to trade the health of perhaps everyone on Earth for my personal safety."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes," George said. "Let someone else figure it out."

She shook her head and glanced one last time at her beautiful, doomed specimen. "Help me with the dog. Then I'll clean everything out of my lab, as you want."

5

The four humvees wound upward through the hills. Up on the mountain, about eight miles away now, the wreck sprawled like a giant trashcan lid someone had hammered onto the ridgetop. Corporal Denise Wyrzbowski watched it as best she could while wrestling her humvee along the unpaved road. No sign of activity at this distance. She distrusted the quiet, though; eetees were always busy with something.

The rolling terrain blocked the line of sight beyond the nearer slopes, but at least here it was grassland, dry and scant. Up ahead, pine trees accumulated with altitude until deep forest blanketed the highest ridges. Too much cover for the enemy.

She didn't feel comfortable here. She wasn't a country girl. She had fought house to house in the San Bernadino Valley with seized eetee firearms and makeshift body armor, but that was familiar freeway-and-subdivision country. You recognized what belonged and what didn't. Up there in the forest, she wouldn't know whether a sudden flight of birds was a nature show or an eetee ambush.

Not that she hadn't seen new sights in the Valley: eetees roaring along Figueroa Avenue in a Lincoln Navigator; eetee muckamucks cavorting in a swimming pool full of yellow slime; eetee grunts dead and bloated in an alleyway, lunch for a pack of feral dogs.

Movement in the sky. She tensed, then recognized it as a vulture rising on an updraft. Road kill nearby? "What's that?" she asked the guide, a prim Nordic-looking local named Otis Redinger.

He turned to cast a disinterested glance in the direction she pointed. "Probably a dead gook," he said. "Or maybe a jackrabbit."

"A dead eetee?" Adrenaline stirred in her blood. "What could kill them out here? In the middle of nowhere?"

Redinger shrugged. "They lose their body suits, get a puncture, they're pretty vulnerable."

"Vulnerable, my gold-plated ass!" Wyrzbowski remembered how two of the mucousy little freaks had ripped apart Lieutenant Atherton with their bare talons while hopping up and down with glee. Silently: that was the really freaky part. Everyone knew they had some kind of mind talk.

Redinger said, "A ruptured body suit, and they're only good for a few days in the heat. Sheriff thinks they're short of water and fighting over it. We had a dry winter, no rain at all since May—and there's only a few small lakes up there. In town, we get our water from three hundred feet underground."

"How often do you get expeditions coming after your water?"

He shrugged again and pointed. "Turn left up here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A narrower gravel road led away through the hills. Wyrzbowski swung the humvee onto it, the others followed, and they began to bounce along in earnest, raising a column of dust visible to any eetee on the mountain. She glanced back. At this distance, the town had almost disappeared. A line of trees followed the course of a single winding stream. Yesterday, she had glanced over a bridge and seen that stream bed almost dry. Lucky Lewisville: a year of drought, a moat of waterless grassland ten miles deep.

She thought about the water jugs they carried with them, about a shipload of eetees dying of thirst, and despite the blazing heat she took a hand from the wheel to pull on the helmet of her body armor.

A fence had been running along the right-hand side of the road. Up ahead, it bent right again and marched away across the hills, dividing fallow farmland from patchy brush. The bushes looked green. Further on, she could see the silvery foliage of cottonwoods and willows. She wasn't a Campfire Girl, but she could guess what trees meant out here.

Water.

She braked, and the line of hummers behind them did the same. In the back seat, Lieutenant Briggs glanced around nervously.

"What's the deal, Redinger?" she snapped at the guide. "Your sheriff claimed there was a big cache of eetee machinery abandoned here. Unguarded. But there's water here, right? And you still say there's no eetees camped out?"

Redinger looked offended. He was pulling out a Ruger Mini-14 that the colonel had given him leave to carry today. "We poisoned it," he said.

"Poison?" Briggs said, leaning forward.

"That's right. We dumped fertilizer in the pond. They can't take it. We saw 'em die when they tried to drink or swim in the creek, too much farm runoff. One of our doctors said it must be their, ah, electrolyte balance."

Well, gee, that could explain what had puzzled idiots like Atherton: why the downed eetees hadn't spread out into the California farmland. They'd stayed in the suburbs for treated water fresh from the tap.

"So if it's safe," she asked Redinger, "why do you suddenly need the gun?"

"Eh?" He looked at his firearm. "Oh. Sometimes one of 'em gets desperate. You get some sick gooks hanging around, waiting to die."

Wyrzbowski glanced into the back seat. "Sir?"

Briggs leaned back, nodded. "We go in. Be careful."

She put the hummer in motion again, slowly. Soon the road dead-ended in a dirt turnaround. Beyond that lay cattails and a sheet of greenish scum about fifty yards across, hemmed in by leafy brush and cottonwoods. Way, way too much cover.

Along the shoreline at different points she could see the hardware the locals had mentioned, gargoyle surfaces peeking through the foliage. From here she couldn't recognize anything, but it was enough to give the colonel a real hard-on.

She personally wished he'd worry less about a few power cells falling into civilian hands and more about the vicious castaways on the mountain, every one of them as eager as the Terminix man to commit mass de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

struction on *H. sapiens*. Sure, the Army desperately needed all it could gather up, both to fight eetees and to keep control of restive civilians (and they did always seem to be restive). Everyone had heard about the hushed-up disaster at Yosemite: refugees so hungry they were eating eetees, who'd used some never-specified but terrifying eetee gewgaws to slaughter soldiers and loot their supplies.

Still, the colonel wasn't the one who had to drive his ass around right under eetee sights.

One day, Wyrzbowski thought, the so-called liberation of Earth would become a reality. She would never again have to inhale the stink of eetee splatter on a hot day. She would never again have to wonder when the next fearmonger would flatline her brain. She would never again have to worry about restive civilians shooting her in the back, or about participating in sleazy deceptions like this quarantine scam of the colonel's. She would go back to being a citizen of a goddamn democracy: all *Homo sapiens* are created equal, all eetees are vulture food.

She would lie in the shade, pop a cold beer, eat a hamburger.

"Let's go," said Briggs. Wyrzbowski pulled down her visor and rolled out of the hummer into low crouch, and the other five followed her. At least Briggs had enough sense to put on his helmet.

A trail led along the shore in both directions. Briggs sent one group right, another left; she got the left-hand job. Some soldiers stayed with the hummers to guard them; others headed away from the pond altogether, up the slope.

Her six worked slowly along the grassy trail. She sweltered inside her armor. The sun raised a sewage-y stench off the stagnant pond, and horseflies the size of mice dive-bombed their heads. Insects in the grass fell silent as they approached and buzzed loudly again after they passed.

They reached the first pile of hardware without incident. Wyrzbowski took off a glove and gingerly touched the squat, lobed central piece. It was cool to the touch and, on the shady side, sweated condensation. Still working, whatever it was. She duck-walked around it. On the far side, a tube four inches in diameter snaked through the grass toward the pond. Her guess: some kind of purification unit.

Further along the trail, other globby Tinkertoys shone inscrutably in the sun. A lot of working hardware here. It didn't look all that abandoned, whatever the locals claimed.

Shouts. She twisted around. They came from the hummers, but she couldn't see well through the foliage. A plasma rifle opened up, setting a tree ablaze. And then eetee fire caught a hummer and blew it apart like the Fourth of July.

Wyrzbowski dropped on her belly and elbowed swiftly back to the others. "Back!" she whispered.

Her soldiers spread out among the trees, belly-crawling through the grass. Now the whole pondside was jumping with eetees in body suits. No, the gooks hadn't left their little water-treatment plant unguarded.

More fire from the soldiers at the turnaround, but not as much as there should be. She reached a rotting stump, balanced her rifle, whistled the signal over her mike. While Preston and Weinberg played rear-guard, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rest chose their targets deliberately. She sighted on the nearest of the eetees hopping toward Briggs, who stood as motionless as a department-store mannequin. She pressed the trigger. Got the hopper—whoops, a little splatter on the lieutenant. Other soldiers near Briggs had turned deer-in-the-headlights too, perfect targets. Just like Atherton. There must be a mind-bender in this crew.

Wyrzbowski tried to sort out the pattern as she picked off a second hopper. Eetees descended the hillside beyond the humvees; more had popped up on the other side of the pond—but those soldiers were returning fire, so no mind control over there. A whistle from Weinberg to the rear. Enemy on *their* tail, too, but her group wasn't pissing their pants in cold terror.

Up there, then. On the hillside. She whistled another signal as she splattered a third eetee.

The other five came crawling to her. She raised her visor and whispered, in case the eetees were listening to radio. "There's an officer up there. We're going to get it."

The six of them spread out again, creeping through grass and brush away from the pond. The eetees attacking them from the rear hadn't figured out what they'd done and joined the action at the humvees. Now Wyrzbowski could see the muckamuck, resplendent in the egg-sack slime of its body suit, wielding its red fearmonger while flunkies covered its spindle-shanked ass. Poor freak: a year ago it had been one of the exterminator kings of the galaxy, and now here it was on guard duty at a polluted frog pond. She wondered if the eetee mind-benders could hear human minds, if they took pleasure in the terror they caused.

She wriggled forward, hoping she wasn't already too close to the muckamuck. One of the hopper flunkies must have sensed something. It turned toward her soldiers. Silent communication and a rush of excited hopping. A bush in Phillips' direction burst into a flutter of shredded leaves. Someone, she thought Merlino, fired back, burning two of the hoppers.

The flunkies had left their muckamuck exposed, but it had also turned its glistening head in their direction. Searching. Not much time, Wyrzbowski thought, and right then the terror boiled out of the back of her skull.

It spilled like ice into her guts, congealed her limbs into stone. Time stopped. The hillside sharpened into impossibly sharp focus, cutting itself into her consciousness: light and shadow on a patch of wild rose; the gym-socks smell inside her helmet; a horsefly crawling across the visor.

She knew she just had to focus. Sight on the chest. Press the trigger. That's all she had to do.

An eetee landed on her back, then exploded drippily onto her armor. Concrete encased her hands, her arms. She heard someone whimpering and knew, from experience, that it was herself. Your buddies cover your back, but you have to face down your fear by yourself. Just focus. Breathe. Press the trigger, press press *press*. And her finger *moved*—

The weight dropped from her limbs. The ice melted from her body and left her, gasping, in the hot sunlight. She managed to raise her head. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

muckamuck was nowhere to be seen, though its fearmonger had come to rest in a rosebush. She grabbed a handful of grass to wipe the viscous blobs clinging to her visor, and then scooped up the fearmonger for her collection. Four officers and counting.

The grunt eetees fled the hillside. She whistled. One by one Weinberg, Preston, and Bernard appeared. Then Merlino dragged toward her through the brush. He'd taken a burn on the shoulder plate of his armor. "Phillips?" she asked. He shook his head.

She couldn't think about that now. She pointed down the hill, toward the single remaining humvee. As they ran at a crouch, Weinberg supporting Merlino, she took stock. It looked better than she'd expected. The party on the far side of the pond was still kicking, targeting the eetees trying to pick off survivors at the turnaround. The hoppers must have known their grand and mighty mind-bender was now only a nasty spray of goobers, because as soon as her party came up behind, they turned and fled altogether.

Briggs was gone. It was Sergeant Libnitz who gave the orders: the wounded in the humvee, others to jog behind.

Redinger appeared out of nowhere to lope beside her. He didn't have so much as a singe-mark on him despite not being armored, but he was stinking wet from pond water. She raised her visor; she needed the air. She was soaked inside her armor, too, but from sweat.

"How come *you're* still alive?" she asked.

"Jumped in the pond and swam to your side," he gasped.

"Clever," she said. Redinger didn't fool her. The Lewisville militia had sent them into the ambush. When the reckoning came, she would make sure to splatter *this* prick for Phillips. She wished, not for the first time, that she knew how to use her red souvenir. She would make this little fuckhead shit himself, she would make him weep, she would feed him suffering and degradation. *Then* she would splatter him.

Adrenaline and the rush of hatred kept her moving until they reached the junction. And then the humvee in front of her stopped. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!" Libnitz was shouting.

She stopped, panting and dizzy from the heat. Then saw what he swore at.

Back in town, five miles away, black smoke coiled into the flawless blue sky. She made her way to Libnitz. "Can't raise anybody on the radio," he said..

6

Out the café's back window, Alexandra Gundersen could see the Neanderthals coming out of their caves to beat their chests. It was the Big Noisy Machines the Army had driven into town; now Ben and his boys worried that their dicks were too small. So now they had to kill something, or make a big explosion. Nothing made your little dick feel bigger.

"I'm so sorry, Colonel," she said to the Army man. "They're all lent out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right now. It's been such a popular book. I'll try to get one for you by tonight. In the meantime, let me check those other books out for you."

The colonel responded to her warm tone with a slight relaxation of posture. The lightening of his expression was not yet sufficient to call a smile. While Alexandra stamped his books, she glanced through her lashes at the window again. Ben and his *unter*-cavemen had separated and now walked in different directions. Her twin James aimed straight toward the café's back door. It was, unfortunately, too late to escape.

She handed Colonel Fikes his books and smiled again, and this time he did smile in return. He would be back. She knew her customers, and, for better or worse, she knew men.

The colonel headed through the adjoining bookshop toward the front door, even as brother James pushed through the back into the café.

"Good morning, Sandy," James said cheerfully.

Her twin used her childhood nickname only to annoy her. Since these days he preferred the proletarian *Jim,* she paid him back in kind. "Hello, James."

James stared at her customers significantly. Despite the Army's prohibition on civilian assembly, and the loss of power that made it impossible to open her café (only locally grown herbal or mormon tea anyway, alas), she could still let up to seven civilians and any number of soldiers into the bookshop. She no longer *sold* books or videos these days, with no new stock arriving in the foreseeable future, but she did lend them out, and since the demise of TV and radio, her store had always been busy. "Can we talk?" said James.

Alexandra waved at her assistant, deep in conversation with a soldier, to signal her departure. "Come on," she said to James. She led him through the door marked *Private,* into her stockroom's little office. "What do you want, James?"

"We need your help," he said.

We meant *Ben,* of course. How flattering that when Biggest Dick caveman needed a woman's help, he still thought of his ex-wife—though he was too cowardly to show up in person.

"I can't imagine what use I could be to you deputies."

"The Army stole some things from us," James said, "and we need to get them back."

"You mean your weapons."

"Sandy," James said, "we've been protecting you with those weapons."

"Isn't the Army going to take over that job?"

"Are they acting as if they came here to fight eetees?" James's foot jittered suddenly as Alexandra fixed him with a frown. "And what will you do when you need protection *from the Army?*"

The soldiers had come yesterday: hard men, and a few women too, in desert camo and heavy boots, laden with guns. She hadn't liked them. But they hadn't dragged *her* off to "quarantine." When the very first tanks rolled into Lewisville, Alexandra had undertaken serious thinking on the subject of boss cavemen and the very biggest rocks. By the time the soldiers showed up at her door, her shop and house had been cleared of all eetee artifacts. She had smiled and offered them tea.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They had frightened her nevertheless.

"I don't particularly like this . . . occupation," she said. "But the soldiers are acting under orders from our government."

"*Our* government?" said James. "The eetees nuked *our* government. These folks are enforcers for a military dictatorship."

"And just what is Sheriff wonderful Ben Gundersen setting up? How much has *he* been promoting your precious civil rights and rule of law?"

James's foot jittered again. Poor James. He fancied himself such an independent thinker. But when the other cavemen start heaving around rocks and grunting, you have to join in. Otherwise they might think you have a *really* little dick.

Okay, so it wasn't the actual, physical dick (*obviously,* in Ben's case!) that determined where you stood in Neanderthal hierarchy. It was all the subtle, almost imperceptible inflections of display, of action and reaction, dominance and deference, intimidation and submission, and meanwhile the metaphorical dick grows bigger and bigger. Fear, manipulation, and mind control. The boss caveman is created by *attitude,* his, theirs. Hers—although she had at last won free.

"I grant you," James said, "Ben's gone overboard sometimes. But he's kept the town together in difficult times, he's really done a tremendous job. He's preserved . . . *civilization* here, when the war turned the rest of our country into rubble."

Alexandra knew there was some truth in what her brother said. Behavior that was bad for a marriage might be less bad for a town. Because of Ben's diligent ruthlessness, she could sleep at night, she could still open up her store and serve customers. But it wasn't the whole story, was it?

"Order," she said, "is not the same as civilization. Order is about the strong controlling the weak. *Civilization* is about *protecting* the weaker from the stronger, about us all living *together* in empathy, cultivating the connections between us—"

"Sandy," said James, "empathy *is* what we're after. We want the Army folks to *empathize* with our point of view."

"With the aid of weapons," she said sharply. James made no reply, but he jiggled his foot again. "I don't want any part of it. I'm a civilized person. I won't participate in violence against fellow human beings, moreover against people who are serving my country. And I thought I had made myself clear. I have no interest in doing anything for or because of Ben, ever, I want to have no connection with him *at all, ever again,* and this is *his* plan. Don't tell me it isn't."

"Don't make this personal—"

"It *is* personal. It's all personal. You want to belong to a cause that's bigger than you and, and—then you don't have to think about your actions. *Your* violence is good, *theirs* is bad. And then it's a big flashy Hollywood story, small-town heroes fight off aliens *and* the bad Army guys at the same time. But it all begins with *you,* James, and me, and Ben. Good and evil begin in each person's heart and mind. *That's* the story."

James began to laugh. "You and Ben were a Hollywood story, all right. The problem was, you both wanted top billing." Alexandra flushed, en-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

raged at his mockery, yet another betrayal of *her,* his *twin sister*. He ducked his head and said, hastily, waving his hands, "No, no, forget about Ben, okay?"

"How can I? This *is* all about him, and his ego. He just can't stand not being the one on top!"

"It's only about Ben for you, Sandy. And doesn't that mean you're making it all about *you?*" That stopped her. James went on: "It's the *town* that needs your help. Your *neighbors*. Individuals. It's *your* choice to do good and not evil to them."

"And you," she said coldly, "are so sure this is for their own good."

"What good has the Army done for Lewisville so far? What happens to *your* business when they've locked away half the town? Do you think they'll go on differently than they've begun?"

No, that did seem unlikely. Alexandra looked away.

After the divorce, exhausted and alone, she had convinced herself that what she had most wanted was the opposite of her life with Ben. She wanted to live quietly. She wanted a loving world founded on empathy, not conquest. Starting up her café-bookstore had been part of it, a microcosm of her ideal of civilization, bringing people together for the exchange of ideas and fellowship. And hadn't she been successful at that, at least in a small way?

But, to tell the truth, it was boring. And while she dwindled into a mousy spinster, the bookstore lady, the war came along and metamorphosed Ben into a gun-toting action hero. Not that she could ever have fought the eetees the way he had. She had no physical courage and would sooner pick up a poisonous viper than a gun. But—admit it, James was right—she *hated* being out of the spotlight. She hated *Ben* hogging the stage.

And now, wriggling up from the dark depths of her psyche, came this self-destructive impulse to prove herself to Ben. To the town. To prove she was useful in this new caveman world of fear and guns, and not just in the sad, lost world of civilization, where she had known she was Ben's superior.

Had Ben known she would feel such an impulse? Had he known she would be more afraid of the strange cavemen, the Army soldiers, than the cavemen she knew?

Fear, manipulation, and mind control. Good old Ben. Once she had admired that will toward dominance.

Then, James said, "Maybe you're afraid you won't measure up." Reading her mind, too—he was her twin, after all.

Strange how knowing what was in someone else's mind ought to give you empathy for that person. Instead it seemed as if only the weak could sustain empathy. The strong couldn't resist the temptation to use their knowledge to get what they wanted.

Defeated by James and Ben, by her own *attitude*, Alexandra said, "All right. Tell me what you want me to do."

And so that afternoon, clad in a clingy flowered sundress and straw hat, her long blond hair spilling over her shoulders, Alexandra walked up to a pair of beefy soldiers and smiled. "Excuse me? Officers? I wonder if I could get into the warehouse."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One of the soldiers swiveled his head toward her, so she could see her reflection in his sunglasses. She still looked pretty damn good. The soldiers' guns turned her stomach queasy and her hands cold, but, she told herself firmly, what was in their minds mattered more.

"We're not officers, ma'am—" the soldier began, politely.

"Oh!" she said. "Of course! How silly of me! You're not the *police!*"

"—but no," he went on, "we can't let you into the warehouses."

"But you see," she said, "I rent space in one. For some of my overflow." He was staring politely but blankly at her. "I own a bookstore, you see? The only one in town. And your colonel, Mr. Fikes, came in today and we started talking about Lewis and Clark, and whether they should be admired as brave explorers, or whether they were just the vanguard of genocide and colonial oppression, and he asked for a book about them."

She smiled again at them. Their body language was changing subtly but unmistakably: shoulders relaxing, faces turning towards her. Excitement mixed with terror rose in her. They were falling for it. . . .

"I recommended *Undaunted Courage* to start with, but, as you can imagine, it's a popular book around here, at least since there hasn't been any TV. I didn't have any copies left in the store, but I know there are some out here in the warehouse. So I came out here to pick up a copy for the colonel. You can check with him if you like."

Part of her still hoped the soldiers would send her away, and she would be able to tell James she had done her best. But she was also fiercely willing them to submit.

He nodded. "All right, Ms.—?"

"Alexandra Hanover," she said, using her maiden name.

"I'll have to accompany you."

"Oh, that's fine!" she said, and smiled her most glorious smile at him. And she followed him across the parking lot between the tanker trucks, and through the big roll-up door.

The space inside was cavernous, dark and cool. The soldiers had shoved aside quite a few of the pallets and shelving units to make room for their equipment, and the smells of diesel oil and sweat mingled with the older dusty scent of dried peas. The guard accompanying her paused to explain their mission to a man leaning over a trestle table—probably a genuine officer.

The man at the table looked her up and down with a hard, suspicious stare, but Alexandra smiled at him, too, with just the right mixture of hopeful inquiry, submission to his authority, and winning, wholesome cheerfulness. (Oh, it *was* going to work. All those years with Ben had been good for something after all.) Then he, too, nodded.

She and her guard threaded their way around pallets laden with sacks of dried peas, heading toward the back of the warehouse. The shelving units that she rented stood against the wall at the back, next to a locked metal door that led outside.

Next came a part that depended on her own physical quickness, something she had never had to rely upon before. But excitement propelled her now. She no longer wanted to turn back.

"Could you help me?" she asked the guard. "I have a bad back." The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

guard glanced at her. She pointed. He still wore his sunglasses, so he wouldn't be able to see the nervous tremor in her hands. "It's in that box there, on the second shelf."

He bent over, reaching for the box. Alexandra opened her purse and took out the vet's tranquilizer dart that James had given her. The guard started to pull the box off the shelf. She reached over and stabbed his neck with the dart.

"Hey!" he yelled, turning swiftly toward her. She backed up, but before he could take a single step, his knees buckled and he pitched face forward onto the concrete floor.

That looked as if it hurt. But she could not help smiling. She had done it!

She reached in her purse again and took out the key that James had given her, doubtless Reggie Forrester's. She slid back the deadbolts and opened the door.

The gravel lane behind the warehouse was deserted except for a skittering stray cat. For a moment she thought the soldiers must already have arrested Ben's deputies. Then behind her, inside the warehouse, a commotion erupted: people yelling, booted feet clomping at a run across concrete.

And then brother James rose out of the brush on the far side of the lane and ran toward the back door. A line of Lewisville deputies followed him. Two tremendous explosions detonated at the front of the warehouse, one right after the other. A blast of heat and smoke and a rain of debris rattled across the interior of the warehouse. Alexandra jumped outside through the doorway.

Alexandra thought: people were being shot, even killed. She had helped it happen. It was a betrayal of everything she thought she stood for. Why was she so excited?

But then, at that same moment, moving so unbelievably fast that she barely had time to register what happened, a dark shape roared across the sky, shrank into a distant speck. Another deafening explosion—

The deputies all ducked belatedly. "Raid! Raid! Eetees!" James shouted. Now gunfire and screams echoed from inside the warehouse.

Then a band of eetees, all thin heads and long froggy legs, came around the corner of the warehouse and started shooting.

She had never seen them in the flesh. They weren't supposed to come out in daylight! Terrified, she flung herself back inside, crawled away among the pallets into the darkest corner she could find, and wedged herself behind a row of fiberboard barrels, arms over her head. Smoke filled her nose and mouth. Explosions echoed through the warehouse, more yelling and screaming, the crash of metal shelves overturning.

Then she heard a sound right nearby.

She looked up. One of the aliens squatted atop a stack of barrels. It apparently hadn't seen her yet. It gazed out from its high vantage point into the chaos of the warehouse. The alien wasn't any larger, really, than a Great Dane or a teenage boy. It had long legs and arms and wore some kind of glistening translucent all-over covering like a wetsuit, and its taloned glove held a long-barreled red pistol. It smelled like slightly rancid raw chicken. Alexandra looked at its narrow chest for one of those red

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whorled pendants James had once shown her, carried by the high-ranking eetees, that could paralyze this entire warehouse full of men. She did not see one.

She must have made a sound—whimpered, perhaps—because the eetee turned and glanced down at her. Its narrow face was unreadable behind the slimy protective sac. Its pistol was aimed at her negligently, as if she were no threat at all, but

she
really
did
not
like
guns.

As angry as if it were Ben, Alexandra threw her weight into the stack of barrels. The eetee toppled to the floor along with all the rolling, tumbling sections of its unstable perch. The pistol flew from its hand, fell and struck Alexandra's hip. Her first instinctive reaction was to bat the horrible object away from her; then, fumbling, she grabbed for it and caught the wrong end.

The eetee scrabbled to its feet, heaving barrels aside. Alexandra reoriented the pistol with two clumsy, shaking hands, and took aim. She clearly did not inspire fear: instead of ducking behind a barrel or throwing itself to one side, the eetee fixed Alexandra with its egg-yolk gaze.

Icy blackness swept her mind, it stopped her breath and froze her limbs—

But the eetee didn't, it *surely* . . .

The overwhelming weight of her terror crushed the half-finished thought toward nothingness, and all that Alexandra could grab hold of was her desperate rage. She was so tired of being on the sidelines, the one *not in control*. She realized she had squeezed her eyes shut. She forced herself to open them. There was no blackness except on the backs of her eyelids.

Mind control she understood.

She pressed the button on the red pistol and the eetee *exploded,* showering the wall above her with great gobs and ropy drips of what looked like snot.

"Take *that, Ben,*" she whispered.

Civilization is a wonderful thing, but survival trumps it every time.

Then a human soldier, a black woman, pushed through the barrels toward her to offer a hand. "The warehouse is burning! Come on!"

The soldier took the red pistol from Alexandra's now nerveless hands and tugged her through an obstacle course of tumbled communications equipment, pooled blood, dead human and alien bodies, and furiously burning sacks of dried peas. At last they burst onto the smoke-filled parking lot. The remains of the Army's fuel trucks still blazed brightly. Soldiers pushed her down behind a tank.

"This the one who let the militia in?" one of them said.

"She splattered the froggy with the fearmonger," her rescuer told them. "Lucky for you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But there had been no fearmonger.

As the flood of paralytic terror receded, dragging cold shakiness in its wake, Alexandra's last thought but one rose back into sight. The eetee hadn't carried a fear gun. It hadn't needed one to shoot her full of abject terror.

Noise and commotion went on for a long time after that: the burning diesel, eetee aircraft sweeping overhead, explosions, missiles screaming into the sky, shouts, rattling gunfire. Alexandra knew Ben's plan had gone entirely wrong, and she was, plainly and simply, screwed. Ben and his deputies were even more screwed, if they weren't already dead. Now Lewisville really would suffer a military occupation. They would *all* be herded into camps.

Still, right at the moment she felt like God looking down on creation. She had killed an eetee.

Her brain could not leave alone the image of that clouded alien face at the moment she had pressed the trigger.

All this time she'd been hearing about Ben and his deputies—so brave to venture out, over and over, against such a terrible weapon—and it turned out there was *no such thing* as a fear gun.

The red pendants must be just some kind of officer's insignia. It said you were *authorized,* you had the *ability* or the *training* to wield terror. But as for the fear itself—

It all begins and ends in the mind.

7

Fred crossed the dry, thistly lawn and stopped in front of the old brick building with the flagpoles that Harvey would never let him piss on. In hot weather the children stayed away and the building usually sat empty, but now the strangers had brought grownup people there. Fred hoped Harvey might be one of them.

Fred dropped his burden to sample the air for Harvey's scent. The air was still heavy with the acrid taste of yesterday's conflagration. He reared on hind legs to put his nose to the window. No one had opened the mesh covering, but the sash had been raised so he could smell all the guests packed inside. There were even more than at the big barbecues Harvey and Susan used to hold. The people were not enjoying this party, though. Many stood in line in front of a table. The rest sat around on cots or folded blankets, glum, angry, or fearful.

Fred recognized some of the people. Mister Mayor drifted along the line of people, talking. Fred could tell that Mister Mayor felt glum and fearful, too, but he soothed the others with his warm smooth voice that had always reminded Fred of cow fat.

At the table at the head of the line sat the woman vet who had kept Fred tied up in the cold hard room. With her was the otherwise nice man who had helped with the big, long, nasty needle. Now the vet-woman had a lot more needles with her, and the nice man as well as some of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strangers were helping her, sticking needles in each person and writing things down.

Near the table Fred noticed Alexandra, who had stopped coming out to Harvey's a long time ago. Alexandra hadn't liked Fred's nose, even when he'd sniffed her crotch in the friendliest way. Alexandra had already gone through the line and now *she* was smiling and being friendly to some of the strangers.

Ben was not talking to the strangers or to Alexandra. Ben had a leash between his feet and hands and he could only shuffle along. Several strangers led him forward to get stuck with a needle. Fred hoped Ben would be okay. The night before, he had smelled Ben, angry and afraid, through a basement window in the building with the big statue.

At last, in the far corner, Fred located Susan, and nearby, Harvey. Harvey sat on a cot and stared miserably at the wall.

Fred remembered the old days when he and Harvey had romped for hours in the cool of the evening, when the two of them had been joyously happy together. Then Harvey had grown afraid: so afraid of the world and of Fred, he thought he should kill Fred, even though he didn't want to.

Fred so much wanted Harvey and Susan to be happy again. When Harvey got the present Fred was trying to give him, he would quit being so miserable and alone. He would know that he didn't have to be afraid of Fred.

Fred picked up the present in his jaws again and loped around the corner of the brick building. A couple of the strangers' trucks pulled out of the driveway. Their occupants paid no attention to him.

Toward the back of the brick building it was cooler and shady. A cat turd lay under a bush. For a moment, he thrust his nose against it, intrigued. Then he recalled his mission. He would not be able to go home if he failed, not while Harvey and the vet-woman wanted to kill him.

He continued to the back door of the place where the children used to eat. The sweet odor of old garbage lingered here, but there were also fresh smells where cans of oil, bags of potatoes, and crates of stale crackers and raisins had rested on the cement for a few moments. Most interesting was the delirious scent of raw meat. Someone had recently killed a cow.

From inside the building, Fred could smell boiling potatoes. He trotted up to the door itself. Two sweaty strangers guarded it. Fred put down the present and wagged his tail.

Hello, he said to them, in the new way he had learned.

They glanced down. "Hey, boy," said one of the strangers. Fred wagged his tail some more and the stranger patted him on the head. The stranger liked him. Most people liked Fred.

I like you, too, Fred told him, wagging some more. *Will you open the door, please?*

The stranger pulled open the door. He didn't look down as Fred picked up his present and trotted inside. It was just the way it had worked with Harvey and Susan, and at the big building that was kind of like the vet's. The nice man hadn't noticed he was letting Fred out. It was because he had wanted Fred to be happy, even though he was afraid Fred was sick.

None of them would be afraid of Fred anymore if they understood that Fred wasn't sick, he had just learned to do some new things.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They would learn new things, too. They would all be happy once they understood each other. They would stop being afraid of each other, and hating each other, and trying to make each other do things. Like him, they would take off their leashes and run joyously, rapturously free.

At least, that's what he hoped they would do. But people were sometimes unaccountable.

Fred followed the scent of raw meat into a big kitchen where there was a lot of stainless steel. Men and women chopped potatoes and onions, and big pots of water steamed on the burners. More strangers with guns stood around, making sure the men and women didn't go outside. The strangers were looking forward to the meat, too.

Don't bother about me, Fred told them, and no one did, because they didn't want to. It was a little sneaky, a coyote trick.

Off to one side, one of the men was spilling a bowl of stinky chopped onions into a big vat of ground-up raw meat, ruining its smell. *Why don't you stop and talk to your friend?* Fred asked him, knowing, because of the new way, that it was what the man really wanted to do.

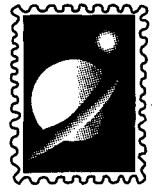
He couldn't do this to the coyotes. They would have caught on right away. But, except for Harvey, the humans didn't know yet that Fred was talking to them, or that he was trying to get them to do things, just for their own good. Until then he could be a little sneaky.

Fred trotted over to the vat of ground-up cow and dropped in the present he had carried all the way from the vet's.

"Hey!" the man yelled, suddenly noticing him. "Get away from there! How'd you get in?" But he wasn't really mad.

Fred backed away and lay down, wagging his tail. The man began mixing the pungent onions in with Fred's present. By the grill, a woman shouted, "You almost done with that hamburger?" ○

CUSTOMER SERVICE
OR SUBSCRIBER ASSISTANCE



Please direct all changes of address and subscription questions to:

ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION
6 Prowitt Street,
Norwalk, CT 06855

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On Books

Paul Di Filippo

Introduction

I'm writing this column at Harvest Season, so I suppose it's fitting to say that a bumper crop of exciting titles from the indie presses awaits inspection. Let's dig in.

Novels and Novellas

A newish U.K. firm, Telos Publishing, which appears to have gotten its start in the field of *Dr. Who* books, has begun to issue some very attractive novellas and novels unrelated to the be-scarfed Time Lord. Paul Finch brings us *Cape of Wrath* (trade paper, £8.00, 128 pages, ISBN 1-903889-60-X), the bloody tale of a creepy archaeological excursion. On the isolated, storm-wracked island of Crae-ghatir, off the farthest coast of England, a university expedition led by the glamorous Professor Mercy and composed of various grad-student types finds an ancient barrow that contains the remains of a Viking berserker. Although they should have been forewarned by the rune-inscribed stone blocking the entrance, they disinter the fellow's bones, initiating a rash of arcane deaths that ends with the last two survivors battling the Viking in his borrowed flesh.

Finch evokes his landscape quite vividly, and marshals his characters quite well in various action scenes. But the lack of any actual supernatural events during the first half of the book might put some thrill-seekers off.

The same problem cannot be attributed to *King of All the Dead* (trade paper, £8.00, 128 pages, ISBN 1-903889-61-8), by Steve Lockley and Paul Lewis. This book starts off with a bang as a young woman named Lisa, a recent widow (her husband died in a car accident that she herself miraculously survived), rescues a would-be suicide, only to find herself thereafter pursued by a host of zombies representing the titular Lord. What seems for a time to be building to a *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) climax actually veers off in a touching *Carnival of Souls* (1962) direction.

Finally, the novel *Guardian Angel* (trade paper, £9.99, 201 pages, ISBN 1-903889-62-6) by Stephanie Bedwell-Grimes, takes an old riff—what if Heaven and Hell were run as modern businesses, a notion exploited at least forty years ago by Gahan Wilson—and buffs it up nicely, producing a Tom-Holtish comedy with some mild satire of organized religion. Porsche Winter is one of heaven's best Guardian Angels. But when one of her clients has his soul stolen on her watch, her life begins to plummet off its tracks. Disgraced and outcast, it's up to Porsche to find the real traitor in Heaven's ranks. But that tarty outfit that the Devil, her reluctantly accepted ally, has dressed her in really queers her style! Bedwell-Grimes limns Porsche and the cosmic setup deftly, producing some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing akin to the film *Wings of Desire* (1987) as rewritten by Mel Brooks.

Beguilingly winsome, yet with a steel core, IN&OZ (Ministry of Whimsy Press, hardcover, $25.00, ISBN 1-892389-63-0), by Steve Tomasula, is a story about lovers and art set in a pair of Unholy Cities (to bring in a relevant Charles Finney reference) that adjoin each other. In OZ, all is high-culture and ease, while IN features brute labor and hard living. The Mechanic of IN, struck by the notion of abandoning simple auto-repairs for more creative endeavors, meets the Designer of OZ, a beautiful woman who finds his creations charming. But can love blossom between such disparate types? Tomasula's prose is simple yet poetic and his narrative tactics include some spot illos and creative typesetting to render a fabulist romance that's very touching and amusing. As lagniappe, the sheer innovative and handsome design of this book bespeaks what the small press does best.

Tom Piccirilli's abrasively yet intriguingly titled *Fuckin' Lie Down Already* (Endeavor Press, hardcover, $45.00, 56 pages, ISBN 09728656-1-6) does not feature any supernatural events, yet its over-the-top subject matter is presented so outrageously that it enters the realm of the unreal. A New York cop named Clay arrives home one day to find his family murdered. Gut-shot by the lurking killer, the bleeding Clay recovers enough to load the corpses of his son and wife into his car and set out for revenge. Never mind the emergency room, he has a thug and his boss to bring to brutal justice. Like a James Crumley tale filtered through Robert Bloch's sensibilities, this novella (in a signed, limited edition) is a noirish hellbound train.

The award-nominated novella series from PS Publishing—now supplemented by PSP's novels and nonfiction collections—continues to surge forward. Two of the latest entries represent the ongoing work of a veteran and the sterling debut of a newcomer. From Adam Roberts comes *Jupiter Magnified* (trade paper, $16.00, 104 pages, ISBN 1-902-880-56-0). From its grabbing opener— "Jupiter, magnified so as to fill half the horizon, appeared in the night sky suddenly." —to its unconventional closure, this book delves deeply into matters of the heart and soul. Our protagonist, a Swedish poet named Stina Ekman, is in the middle of a love affair gone bad and a career at a dead end when Jupiter makes its appearance, and her reactions to the transcendental spectacle reflect both her personal travails and the world's mass unease. Roberts proves here that the far-future, war-torn venues he so often favors are not the only landscapes he can inhabit. Meanwhile, Robert Wexler steps boldly forward with *In Springdale Town* (trade paper, $16.00, 86 pages, ISBN 1-902880-52-8), a surreal tale of identity confusion that's worthy of Gene Wolfe. A minor Hollywood actor named Richard Shelling (who once played a character named Patrick Travis) relocates to Springdale, an odd New England town. Simultaneously, a New York lawyer named Patrick Travis, with roots in Springdale, makes his return. Who is the doppelgänger, who the original? Are either of the men actually real? And by the way, what exactly is reality, in a town where a wrong turn can lead you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into a funhouse labyrinth? Using witty and significant footnotes as a structural sidelight, Wexler exhibits an assured hand at this kind of game. As his first major publication, this marks him as a writer to watch.

From small acorns, mighty oaks grow. With the original motivation of writing a "Communist ghost story," Howard Waldrop has produced one of his patented alternate histories, a uchronia of surpassing strangeness, *A Better World's in Birth!* (Golden Gryphon, trade paper, $15.95, 51 pages, ISBN unavailable). The year is 1876, and all of Europe has experienced two decades of socialist rule. But the worker's paradise is about to come undone, thanks to the ghostly apparitions of Karl Marx and other founders of the state. Only Comrade Rienzi of the People's Department of Security can get to the bottom of these hauntings. As usual, Waldrop's deadpan, intensive adoption of the mindset of his characters is seamless, and the ending of the investigation is totally unpredictable. We'll never see Waldrop's projected novel on similar themes, *Mars is Red*, but this little gem will solace us.

Like a combination of his first novel, *Green Eyes* (1984), for its swampadelic ambiance, and his latest, *Valentine* (2002), for its focus on two star-crossed lovers, Lucius Shepard's newest book, *Louisiana Breakdown* (Golden Gryphon, hardcover, $21.95, 145 pages, ISBN 1-930846-14-2) comprises a haunting fantasy of psychic enthrallment. The town of Grail, Louisiana, has supernaturally bought centuries of peace and a mild prosperity by continuously re-dedicating to a spirit known as the Good Gray Man a female child as Midsummer Queen, whose reign lasts twenty years. The latest such regent, the beautiful Vida Dumars, is reconciled to the imminent brutal end of her reign until the arrival of outsider Jack Mustaine. In Mustaine she sees some kind of escape from her fate. But the footloose guitar-player has yet to prove himself a true Grail knight. Shepard's prose is folksy and lush, his pacing superb, and his characters fully enlivened. With every passing tale, he's showing himself truly the current heir of Ellison and Leiber and Bradbury. One suspects he might have made a devilish deal with the Good Gray Man himself.

In 1996 Paul Park published a magnificent novel, *The Gospel According to Corax*, which offered a revisionist take on the life of Jesus that owed not a little to Robert E. Howard. (Park's Jesus was as much a brawny brawler as he was a mystic.) My long wait for the companion book is finally over with the arrival of *Three Marys* (Cosmos Books, hardcover, $29.95, 178 pages, ISBN 1-58715-519-2). This volume has a much different tone and feel than its predecessor. Jesus, or Jeshua of Nazareth, is recently and famously dead at the book's open, and so unable to lend his presence to the narrative except in flashbacks filtered through the unreliable or fading or prejudicial memories of the three protagonists: Miriam, Jeshua's mother; Mary of Magdala, his wife; and Mary of Bethany, Lazarus' sister. Between them, they build for us a composite portrait of Jeshua's death and its aftermath. But more importantly, they embody the plight of all women of the period and throughout history: mother, whore, lover, confi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dante, acolyte—these women are stunningly portrayed, often with revisionist effects. (The mother of God as an ugly, cursing, ill-tempered crone?) As for the milieu, Park succeeds in rendering it utterly alien. One gets a sense that the "origin of consciousness in the breakdown of the bicameral mind" that Julian Jaynes famously promoted has not yet occurred. These people are not postmoderns in fancy dress, but creatures of a different, less self-conscious era. And the extra-natural trappings are equally stunning, especially Lazarus's unfortunate living death and Mary of Magdala's visions. As Miriam reflects at one point, "How hard it is to seize the truth . . . to hold it in your hands." Yet with this novel Park has indeed grasped and conveyed some enormous truths about spirituality and its intersection with the mundane world.

Single-Author Collections

Opening and closing with wistfully beautiful prose poems, Mark Rich's new collection, *Foreigners, and Other Familiar Faces* (Small Beer Press, chapbook, $5.00, 66 pages, ISBN unavailable), is a sharp slice of this fine writer's work, featuring several stories seeing print for the first time. Rich writes like a combination of James Thurber and Franz Kafka, evoking ruefully comic domestic situations that partake of the essential absurdity of the universe and human strivings. In a story like "Mrs. Hewitt's Tulips"—where a nebbishy, cuckolded husband finds his life turned around after the arrival of miniature humanoid "little gardeners" in a pack of green hotdogs—we see Rich mining some of the same vein of quotidian miracles that James Blaylock also exploits.

A wealth of bite-sized wonders awaits the reader in Michael Swanwick's *Cigar-Box Faust and Other Miniatures* (Tachyon Publications, trade paper, $14.95, 94 pages, ISBN 1-892391-07-4). Over the last several years, Swanwick has produced a number of fabulist vignettes, ranging from transcribed dream prose ("Writing in My Sleep") to japes on the whims of editors ("The Madness of Gordon Van Gelder"). All are informed by his trademark ingenuity and wit, although each of them exudes a different perfume: some are almost dada-like, while others boast intricately constructed plots within their small spans. Here is proof that Swanwick is fractally self-similar on all levels.

The trouble with so much modern horror is its crudity of approach and its limited sensibilities. Bludgeoned into feeling only the single emotion of revulsion, we end up numb and feeling nothing. Subtle, modulated writers such as Graham Joyce and Jonathan Carroll are drowned in a sea of mediocrity. To refresh your palate with a taste of horror's roots, from a day when the gradations of terror were infinite, turn to Algernon Blackwood's *Pan's Garden* (Stark House, trade paper, $17.95, 253 pages, ISBN 0-9667848-5-5). Blackwood was a consummate cataloguer and dissector of the many shades of uncanny experience, the equal of M.R. James in evoking frissons of weirdness from everyday events. These fifteen stories range from small evocative instants to long, gorgeously detailed, unstoppably cumulative tales of men and women caught up in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

larger forces of Blackwood's beloved Nature. From the opening blast of "The Man Whom the Trees Loved" to the closing trumpets of "The Temptation of the Clay," you'll encounter proof that there are more forces in the universe than accounted for by science. An introduction by Mike Ashley, whose recent biography of Blackwood affirms Ashley's valuable expertise, declares these stories to be "the quintessence of inspired creativity." It's a claim that the book strongly upholds.

Robert Hood might not be the exact modern equivalent of Blackwood, but the ghost stories in his *Immaterial* (Mirror Danse Books, trade paper, Aus$19.95, 191 pages, ISBN 0-958658-36-6) are all clever, well-constructed, and (mostly) subtle, offering a variety of voices and tones, from the wit of Dahl or Collier to the unflinching nihilism of Ligotti. Although some partake of splatterpunk's excesses—a vengeful skeleton gruesomely dissects a thug in "Dem Bones," for instance—most of these pieces mix humor with understated creepiness. I particularly enjoyed "Blurred Lines," in which a blind man's hearing becomes so acute as to shatter the normal barriers of space and time, much in the manner of the great horror flick *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* (1963).

If you're like me, the name Jerry Sohl conjures up only memory of the scathing review Damon Knight gave to Sohl's *Point Ultimate* (1955) in *In Search of Wonder* (1956). If so, that's a shame, because Sohl was a talented writer in many ways, including the scripting of some classic *Twilight Zone* episodes. Now we all have a chance to remedy our ignorance by reading *Filet of Sohl* (Bear Manor Media, trade paper, $16.95, 261 pages, ISBN 0-9714570-3-4). This volume includes ten stories, several appreciations (by William Nolan, Richard Matheson, George Clayton Johnson, and Sohl's children) and two never-before-seen scripts for *Twilight Zone* that were purchased but never produced. In a story such as "Death in Transit," Sohl exhibits some real emotional depth, while "The Ultroom Error" delivers surreal thrills stemming from the strange, unprovoked attacks on an innocent child. Editor Christopher Conlon deserves a lot of credit for compiling this volume and keeping fresh the memories of one of the many journeyman writers whose work accreted the corpus of SF.

John Wyndham, who achieved fame with *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), was a more talented writer than Jerry Sohl by orders of magnitude—yet today, both are in the same boat, with their short fiction generally unavailable. In Wyndham's case, I'm happy to report that Darkside Press is planning to issue four or five volumes of his work, the first of which is *No Place Like Earth* (hardcover, $40.00, 285 pages, ISBN 0-9740589-0). This handsome, well-designed limited edition, compiled by John Pelan with scholarly input from Phil Stephenson-Payne, is a joy to hold and read. The stories represent a sampling of Wyndham's whole long career, ranging in date from 1932 to 1967. Wydham's sophistication and cosmopolitanism are on display even in an early space opera such as "Derelict of Space." In "Una," his brilliance reaches heights of hilarity as the first artificial lifeform—a conical monstrosity that happens to consider itself a woman—falls in love with a representative of an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anti-vivisectionist group. This book and its future companions will consort nicely on your shelf along with the Sturgeon and Wellman career sets.

E.C. Tubb sold his first story in 1951 and is still going strong. Yet till now, there has been no handy retrospective of his career in short fiction, his novels—such as the *Dumarest* cycle—having overshadowed the two hundred plus stories he's produced. But with *The Best Science Fiction of E.C. Tubb* (Wildside, hardcover, $35.00, 203 pages, ISBN 1-59224-072-0), you have a chance to acquaint yourself with his formidable accomplishments. Tubb writes a quick-paced, philosophically lively, bracingly grim kind of short fiction. There's nothing whimsical about the tale of a man forced to murder an unlikely victim via temporal shifts ("Time to Kill") or in the portrait of a world under the domination of alien conquerors bent on transforming mankind through pain ("There's No Tomorrow"). Tubb is almost noirish at times, facing squarely the sins and limitations of the human race. Yet his swift-paced, clean-lined tales always offer grace notes of redemption as well.

Anthologies

Australia continues to flourish as a hotbed of adventurous SF writing in both long and shorter modes. And of course, having a handful of regular magazines as venues for such stories is essential. One such is *Fables and Reflections* (perfect-bound, AUS$9.50, 68 pages, ISSN 1446-1900), edited by Lily Chrywenstrom. Having just won a Ditmar Award, this zine is flying high with issue number five. From Matthew Chrulew's story about super-bugs, "Roach Theory," to Alinta Thornton's "Tanglehound," which finds an intriguing new objective correlative to the interdependence of all the components of the cosmos, this fine little magazine offers a peek into the training grounds for future stars.

Cat Sparks has a good story in *Fables and Reflections*, but it's as editor of *Agog! Terrific Tales* (Agog! Press, trade paper, AUS$24.95, 275 pages, ISBN 0-9580567-2-2) that she really shines this time around. Perhaps even more rewarding than the previous volume from Agog!, this collection of twenty-one stories showcases the wide variety of voices working Down Under. Every piece exhibits at least journeyman competence, while others are masterful. I particularly enjoyed Robert Hood's "JAM Jars," about an alien-fostered nanotech plague, and Martin Livings's "Sigmund Freud and the Feral Freeway," in which a robot psychologist has to conduct some perilous negotiations with a sentient roadway. All in all, this volume is a must-have.

The writing collective known as the Ratbastards steps forth once again with *Rabid Transit: A Mischief of Rats* (Velocity Press, chapbook, $5.00, 50 pages, ISBN unavailable). Deemed in a cover blurb to consist of "interstitial fiction" (the newest synonym for "slipstream"), this five-story project does indeed navigate the borderland between genre and mainstream.

In a story such as David J. Hoffman-Dachelet's "Braiding," with its eerie identity metamorphosis, or in "Wally's Porn" by Victoria Elizabeth Garcia, where a porn writer's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unraveling mentality serves as a kind of twilight zone, we see a fruitful and daring transgression of all borders.

Two fiction-oriented websites have recently ported some of their contents and editorial stances to hardcopy, offering old-fashioned print gateways that might attract new online readers: kind of the reverse of what zines like *Asimov's* do, by offering some of its printwares online. Edited by Luis Rodrigues, *Breaking Windows* (Prime Books, trade paper, $17.95, 245 pages, ISBN 1-894815-59-9) represents the best of the website *Fantastic Metropolis*. A yeasty blend of essays (Moorcock, Miéville, VanderMeer, Emshwiller, *et al*), fiction (Pearlman, Zivkovic, Jeffrey Ford, Rhys Hughes, and others), and interviews (Moorcock and Barrington Bayley engage in a nostalgic dialogue about their younger days), this sampler is well worth your dollar, despite all of its contents being available for free online. This material deserves the permanence of print.

Even more substantial is the new incarnation (a limited, signed hardback) of the website *Infinity Plus*, *Infinity Plus Two* (PS Publishing, hardcover, $65.00, 282 pages, ISBN 1-902880-58-7), edited by Keith Brooke and Nick Gevers. The goal of both book and website is to make accessible once more quality SF that has slipped from print. The editors here succeed beyond your wildest dreams. The stellar lineup leans toward British writers—Stephen Baxter, Adam Roberts, Charles Stross, to mention a few—but the Americans present such as Vonda McIntyre, Terry Bisson, and Lucius Shepard hold up their end splendidly. Most of the stories here will no doubt be unfamiliar treasures to the majority of readers. I for one had never seen Roberts's brilliant "Swiftly," which creates a dystopian steampunk world out of the premise that everything reported in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) was true. This collectible edition proves that there's a wealth of great stories hidden away that deserve a second shot at your attention.

Back to original anthologies, we encounter *Land / Space* (Tesseract Books, trade paper, $16.95, 254 pages, ISBN 1-895836-90-5), edited by Candas Jane Dorsey and Judy McCrosky. Predicated on the theory that geographical and bioregional influences unite a variety of "prairie speculative fiction" writers, despite national boundaries, this volume is hardly dogmatic and prescriptive, but rather embracing and open-minded. Not all the pieces explicitly deal with the thematic landscape, yet there's an underlying sense of unity in this volume, whether the story is a touching fable such as Stephen Michael Berzensky's "Baruch, the Man-Faced Dog," or a hard-SF adventure such as Geoff Hart's "Flatlander Pro Tem." And Dorsey concludes the volume with a bang, with her essay, "Farewell to the Literature of Ideas," a rousing manifesto for a literature centered on passion and place, rather than arid intellectualism.

Editor Jeff VanderMeer has assembled a slipstream or interstitial or surreal or decadent gem—take your choice—in *Album Zutique #1* (Ministry of Whimsy Press, trade paper, $12.99, 199 pages, ISBN 1-892389-60-6). The name derives not from any reference to Clark Ashton Smith's "Zothique" but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from a "Decadent-era writers' group, the Zutistes." In their spirit, VanderMeer has corralled such fellow travelers as Jeffrey Ford, Stepan Chapman, James Sallis, Michael Cisco, D. F. Lewis, and Rhys Hughes to produce mind-bending works of imagination unfettered by conventional genre forms. For instance, Christina Flook's homage to the work of Richard Calder, "The Catgirl Manifesto: An Introduction," takes the shape of an historical essay complete with endnotes. Chapman's "A Guide to the Zoo" is a plotless catalog of some weird beasts modeled on, of all things, famous writers. In short, a sense of playfulness reigns, and that makes for some exciting reading.

Miscellaneous Titles

On the poetry front, we find both old and new. Andrew Lang's 1892 long narrative poem, *Helen of Troy* (Wildside, trade paper, $13.95, 104 pages, ISBN 1-59224-087-9), was once an attempt at modernizing this ancient epic material, but now after the passage of a century has itself become an antique. Yet it is a beautiful and stirring antiquity, whose elegant, unstrained verses will convey much of the pathos of Helen's plight. Cast as a playtoy of the jealous gods, Helen still comes off as a fully rounded character, as do all her suitors and ancillary personages, especially Cassandra. By the closing stanza, which imagines Helen's posthumous shrine— ". . . the symbol of all loveliness, / Of Beauty ever stainless in the stress / Of warring lusts and fears . . ." — you will have a keener sense of the humanity of these ancient warriors and lovers than many a contemporary translation could provide.

Mike Allen's *Petting the Time Shark and Other Poems* (DNA Publications, chapbook, $6.50, 48 pages, ISBN unavailable) catches this fine poet in a mostly solemn mood. "Funeral Pie," for instance, reminds me of Robert Frost's homely melancholy. Yet so varied is the subject matter—SF, fantasy, and horror tropes alike proliferate—that the sheer variety of contexts and approaches will insure an emotional and intellectual roller-coaster ride for the lucky reader.

At the opposite end of the tragicomic spectrum is Mark McLaughlin's *The Spiderweb Tree* (Yellow Bat Press, chapbook, $3.00, 31 pages, ISBN 0-9718215-6-9). The first poem evokes the titular spooky motif, which then figures in nearly every other entry, the majority of which riff playfully on fairy tales and fables. "Ratpunzel," for example, substitutes a giant rodent with climbable tail for the lovely original tower dweller, with amusing results.

In 1971, Arkham House issued Donald Sidney-Freyer's landmark volume *Songs and Sonnets Atlantean*. Now, thanks to Wildside, there's an expanded version: *Songs and Sonnets Atlantean: The Second Series* (trade paper, $15.00, 152 pages, ISBN 1-59224-148-4). A friend to Clark Ashton Smith, Sidney-Freyer and his work partake of that same eldritch ambiance. Many of the poems purport to be translations from the Atlantis originals, and certainly do convey a Dunsanyian otherworldliness. "In an Atlantean Bath" reminds me of Eddison's lush vistas. At the heart of the book is a sixty-page poem, "A Vision

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a Castle Deep in Averonne," which strikes Poe-like notes from the wanderings of two people in search of a dream.

Although shorter and generally less probing and more fannish than the interviews of Darrell Schweitzer, the dialogues conducted by Michael McCarthy with various prominent authors and now collected in *Giants of the Genre* (Wildside, trade paper, $15.95, 173 pages, ISBN 1-59224-100-X) still offer lots of meat. Well-established writers (mostly in the horror field) like Dean Koontz and Ray Bradbury consort with relative newcomers such as Charlee Jacob and P.D. Cacek. All discuss their methodologies, their goals, their struggles to do good work and get published. Some are quite blunt—Poppy Brite and Bentley Little—while others are more gentlemanly (Charles de Lint) or jokey (Forrest Ackerman). Handy bibliographies accompany each talk, but I'd be careful of some of the info given. Fred Pohl's *The Age of the Pussyfoot* (1969) is transformed to *The Age of the Pussycat* (1967).

Collecting his columns from *Absolute Magnitude* and *Artemis* magazines, along with a few other scattered non-fiction appearances, Allen M. Steele offers us *Primary Ignition* (Wildside, trade paper, $19.95, 252 pages, ISBN 1-58715-348-3). Using all his novelist's talents, Steele produces narrative-rich essays that conform to three broad areas: "Space," "Science Fiction," and "Destinations." Whether chronicling shuttle launches, the death of a beloved dog or the high weirdnesses of Las Vegas, Steele is always entertaining and informative. These personable essays go down smooth and easy.

Essays of a vastly different stripe are to be found in *A Tea Dance at Savoy* (Savoy Books, hardcover, £20.00, unpaginated, ISBN 0-86130-112-9), by Robert Meadley. Part of the *New Worlds* circle in the sixties (Michael Moorcock contributes the introduction here), Meadley possesses a flighty, skewed, acidic, voracious intellect that makes connections among a thousand and one different topics, weaving the most incongruous themes into fascinating riffs on literature, art, and life. If Lester Bangs had been part of the SF community, this is what his output might have come to resemble. In a piece such as "Gone to Tesco's," which investigates the genre of westerns to draw astonishing conclusions about film and books and their intersection, Meadley sounds like the most captivating pub-philosopher in the world. How can you not immediately fall in love with an essay that begins, "This piece will be messy"? Moreover, John Coulthart has turned this collection into a glorious *objet d'art*, stuffed with B&W illustrations in eye-popping layouts. Although I still do wish these approximately two hundred pages were numbered.

Joining a series on contemporary authors from the University of South Carolina Press, the volume *Understanding Robert Coover* (hardcover, $34.95, 192 pages, ISBN 1-57003-482-6) by noted fantasist Brian Evenson exhibits a perfect fit between critic and subject. In four extensive sections—"Understanding Robert Coover"; "Early Works"; "*The Public Burning*"; and "Later Works"—Evenson thoroughly and sympathetically and intelligently dissects Coover's brand of surreal metafiction. Employing a mass of historical materi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

al—from old reviews and interviews to prior critical studies—Evenson draws illuminating conclusions about every last publication from the prolific Coover pen, right up to the most recent book, *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (2002). Evenson's own prose is scholarly yet inviting, with nary a shred of off-putting "hermeneutics" or "semiotics" to be found anywhere. Evenson's conclusion that "Robert Coover remains one of the most original and unique writers of his generation" will be attested to by anyone lucky enough to make this critical journey with these two writers.

On the comix front we encounter a lavish book scripted and drawn by the inimitable Paul Pope, whose recent series *100%* for DC Comics was fine near-future SF. Pope's new book might very well bring back fond memories of the Warren and Marvel oversized B&W titles. *Giant THB 1.V.2* (Horse Press, saddle-stapled, $6.95, 96 pages, ISBN unavailable) concerns the adventures of a young woman named HR Watson and her deadly android bodyguard, THB. The pair live on a terraformed Mars inhabited by a bewildering array of human tribes, as well as some intimidating aliens called bugfaces. Pope has created an intricate backstory, as dense as that of *Dune* (1965), to complement the present-day action, which is fascinating on its own merits, a blend of politics and chase scenes, boho conversations and dramatic fights. Pope's punkish yet high-tech artwork, with its glorious chiaroscuro and dense lines, astounds on every page. This is truly an SF comic that is as rich and bizarre as, say, an Attanasio novel.

Forget the trauma of watching the inferior film version of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and return to the first sequence of the Alan Moore/Kevin O'Neill comic that inspired it. Now, be prepared to double your original enjoyment by picking up Jess Nevins's *Heroes & Monsters* (Monkey Brain Books, trade paper, $18.95, 239 pages, ISBN 1-932265-04-X). This is an exhaustive and enlightening annotation of all the sources, literary, cultural, and visual, which Moore and O'Neill employed in their creation. Nevins has amazingly ferreted out hundreds of obscure Victorian icons and other allusions that went into the composition of this steampunkish comic. On top of this feast of referentiality, Nevins also delivers cogent essays on "Archetypes," "Crossovers," and "Yellow Peril," as well as a fascinating interview with Moore, in which the scripter reveals, for instance, his indebtedness to Philip José Farmer. This book is so lively it almost breaks the umbilical linking it with the original creation, becoming fine reading on its own merits.

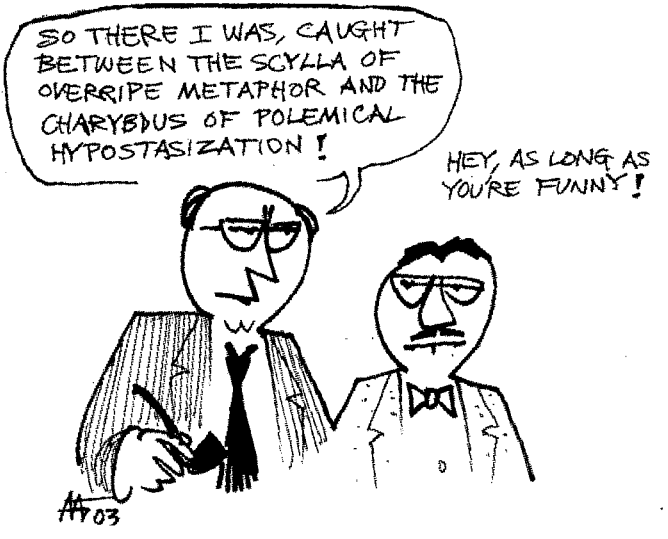
In what comically creepy series would a walking, talking, cigar-smoking skeleton demand that others address him as "flesh-challenged"? Only in Richard Moore's *Boneyard: Volume Two* (NBM, trade paper, $9.95, unpaginated, ISBN 1-56163-369-0). If you recall my review of the first book in this saga, you'll remember that a young man named Paris inherited a cemetery filled with a female vampire, a gear-head werewolf, a lecherous mermaid, and a gaggle of other unlikely spooks. Having gotten friendly with his undead neighbors and the local humans, Paris now finds himself about to lose his new home

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

due to a large bill from the IRS. How to raise money? Would you believe Celebrity Ghoul Boxing? No? Then how about a Spectral Swimsuit Issue? All these possibilities and more are explored through the medium of Moore's fluid B&W artwork and his boffo dialogue.

Publisher Addresses

Agog! Press, POB U302, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia. Bear Manor Media, POB 750, Boalsburg, PA 16827. Cosmos Books, see Wildside. Darkside Press, 4128 Woodland Park Avenue North, Seattle, WA 98103. DNA Publications, POB 2988, Radford, VA 24143. Endeavor Press, 1515 Hickory Wood Drive, Annapolis, MD 21401. Fables and Reflections, POB 979, Woden, ACT 2606, Australia. Golden Gryphon, 3002 Perkins Road, Urbana, IL 61802. Horse Press, POB 285, Bowling Green, OH 43402. Ministry of Whimsy Press, POB 4248, Tallahassee, FL 32315. Mirror Danse Books, POB 3542, Parammatta, NSW 2124, Australia. Monkey Brain Books, POB 200126, Austin, TX 78720. NBM, 555 Eighth Avenue, Suite 1202, NY, NY 10018. Prime Books, POB 36503, Canton, OH 44735. PS Publishing, 1 Hamilton House, 4 Park Avenue, Harrogate HG2 9BQ, U.K. Savoy Books, 446 Wilmslow Road, Withington, Manchester M20 3BW, U.K. Small Beer Press, 176 Prospect Avenue, Northhampton, MA 01060. Stark House, 1945 P Street, Eureka, CA 95501. Tachyon Publications, 1459 18th Street, #139, SF, CA 94107. Telos Publishing, 61 Elgar Avenue, Tolworth, Surrey KT5 9JP, U.K. Tesseract Books, 214-21 10405 Jasper Avenue, Edmondton, Alberta T5J 3S2, Canada. University of South Carolina Press, 718 Devine Street, Columbia, SC 29208. Velocity Press, POB 28701, St. Paul, MN 55128. Wildside Press, POB 301, Holicong, PA 18928. Yellow Bat Press, 1338 West Maumee, Idlewilde Manor #136, Adrian, MI 49221. O


SO THERE I WAS, CAUGHT BETWEEN THE SCYLLA OF OVERRIPE METAPHOR AND THE CHARYBDUS OF POLEMICAL HYPOSTASIZATION!
HEY, AS LONG AS YOU'RE FUNNY!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

The jam-packed Memorial Day weekend is almost upon us, so get ready to party. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For an explanation of con(vention)s, a sample of SF folksongs, info on fanzines and clubs, and how to get a later, longer list of cons, send me an SASE (self-addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at 10 Hill #22-L, Newark NJ 07102. The hot line is (973) 242-5999. If a machine answers (with a list of the week's cons), leave a message and I'll call back on my nickel. When writing cons, send an SASE. For free listings, tell me of your con 6 months out. Look for me at cons behind the Filthy Pierre badge, playing a musical keyboard.—Erwin S. Strauss

MAY 2004

21–23—**KeyCon.** For info, write: **Box 3178, Winnipeg MB R3C 4E7.** Or phone: **(204) 669-6053** (10 AM to 10 PM, not collect). **(Web) keycon.org. (E-mail) loyalminion@hotmail.com.** Con will be held in: Winnipeg MB (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Downtown Radisson. Guests will include: Dave Duncan, James Ernest of Cheapass Games.

21–23—**MobiCon. mobicon.org. wayne417@aol.com.** Airport Plaza Hotel, Mobile AL. SF, fantasy, gaming.

21–23—**FedCon. (0821) 219-0932. fedcon.de.** Maritim, Bonn Germany. Rene Aberjonois, Armin Shimmerman. Star Trek.

21–23—**Anime North. animenorth.com. info@animenorth.com.** Congress Center, 650 Dixon Rd., Toronto ON.

27–31—**Int'l. Space Development Con. nss.org.** Clarion Meridian, Oklahoma City OK. "Settling the Space Frontier."

28–30—**MarCon. marcon.org.** Hyatt, Columbus OH. L. Hamilton, N. Thomas, Zetterberg, Eggleton, Datlow, the Trimbles.

28–30—**Oasis. (407) 263-5822. oasfis.org.** Radisson, Orlando FL. Steele, H. E. Cox, Longcor, McDevitt, R. Schumacher.

28–30—**ConQuest. kcsciencefiction.org.** Kansas City MO. Jennifer Roberson, Steve and Sue Francis, artist Jody Lee.

28–30—**ConDuit. (801) 467-8994. conduit.sfcon.org.** Wyndham, Salt Lake City UT. Lee & Miller, Modesitt, Wolverton.

28–30—**Animazement. (919) 941-5050. animazement.org. info@animazement.org.** Sheraton, Durham NC. Anime.

28–31—**BaltiCon. (410) 536-2737. bsfs.org.** Wyndham, Baltimore MD. L. M. Bujold, D. Seeley, H. R. Alexander, P. Bray.

28–31—**BayCon. (408) 450-1788. baycon.org.** Doubletree, San Jose CA. Swanwick, artist Jael, E. Pelz.

28–31—**WisCon. sf3.org.** Concourse Hotel, Madison WI. Eleanor Arnason, Patricia A. McKillip. "The only feminist SF con."

28–31—**FanimeCon. fanime.com. help@fanime.com.** Convention Center, 408 Almaden Blvd., San Jose CA. (800) 533-2345.

29–30—**ConVivial. empirewideweb.com.** Quality Central, Glasgow Scotland. Victorian SF.

29–31—***Pacific Media Expo. pacificmediaexpo.com/pmx/main.*** *Hilton and Convention Center, Anaheim CA. Anime.*

JUNE 2004

4–6—**DucKon, Box 4843, Wheaton IL 60189. duckon.org.** Radisson, Lincolnwood (Chicago) IL. Eric Flynt, B. Honeck.

4–6—**ConCarolinas, Box 9100, Charlotte NC 28299. secfi.org/concarolinas.** Marriott Executive Park. Corrone, Antzak.

4–6—**A-Kon, 3352 Broadway Blvd. #470, Garland TX 75043. a-kon.com.** Adam's Mark, Dallas TX. Guests TBA. Anime.

4–6—***Book Expo America, 383 Main Ave., Norwalk CT 06851. (800) 840-5614. reedexpo.com.*** *Chicago IL. Trade only.*

11–13—**Dreamcon. (904) 910-0518. dreamcon.net.** Adam's Mark, Jacksonville FL. Niven, Pournelle, Barnes, David, Due.

11–13—**2004: A Fan Odyssey, 509 E. Mountain Ave., Pasadena CA 91104. fanodyssey.org.** Culver City CA. Media.

11–13—**ConTerpoint, Box 2823, Arlington VA 22202. sbrinich@speakeasy.net.** Woodfin, Rockville MD. SF folksinging.

14–Jul. 23—**Odyssey, 20 Levesque Lane #F, Mont Vernon NH 03057. (603) 673-6234.** Manchester NH. Workshop.

18–20—**PortCon, 398 Long Plains Rd., Buxton ME 04093. portconmaine.com.** Portland ME. Nami, D.K. Harrison.

18–20—**BotCon, Box 905, Kendallville IN 46755. botcon.com.** Convention Center, Pasadena CA. Cullen, Akiyama. Anime.

18–20—**Anime Next, Box 1088, Pearl River NY 10965. animenext.org.** Secaucus NJ (near NY City). Commercial con.

19–20—**VulKon, Box 297122, Pembroke Pines FL 33029. (954) 441-8735. vulkon.com.** Tampa FL. Commercial media con.

19–20—**ColoniaCon, c/o Freisinger, Schirmerstr. 36, Cologne 50823, Germany. coloniacon.de.** Giesa. Perry Rhodan con.

24–27—**MidWestCon, 5627 Antoninus Dr., Cincinnati OH 45238. (513) 321-1327. scribe@cfg.org.** Low-key relaxacon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

Asimov's July '04

Advertise in the world's leading science fiction magazines with our Asimov's/Analog combined classified section. Ad rates per issue: $2.95 per word (10 word minimum), $125 per column inch (2.25 inch maximum). SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER: Buy two ads and receive a third ad FREE. Send orders to: Dell Magazines, Classified Department, 475 Park Ave. S., 11th Floor, New York, NY 10016. Direct inquires to: (212) 686-7188; Fax (212) 686-7414 or email: classifiedads@dellmagazines.com

AUDIO/VIDEO

Nova Audio. Scifi Short stories by Robert Silverberg, Sarah Hoyt, Cecilia Tan, & more. http://www.nova-audio.com/

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS

UK's largest online out of print genre bookseller - www.fantasticliterature.com

BOOKS/PUBLICATIONS

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE FICTION print magazine and webzine. http://www.gateway-sf-magazine.com

Dream Seeker: The Velvet Mask Profound book. dailyskew.com/dreamseeker_universe.htm

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK ONLINE, Third Millennium Publishing, a cooperative of online writers and resources, http://3mpub.com

Sci Fi author Paul Collins has a new book out called Prescience Rendezvous, It is available at www.amazon.com or by calling, 1-800-201-7575.

The River Wolf by Scott Langley- A Napoleonic adventure novel in the tradition of Hornblower with an alternate history twist. Available at http://www.3mpub.com/langley/

MISCELLANEOUS

PTCIL - Plan and invest your way to Space. www.poweroftenclubintlltd.org

RELIABLE WEB HOSTING AND E-MAIL just $6.25 per month. Includes your own free domain name. http://www.tigertech.net/sfa

UNUSUAL ITEMS

EXOTIC FOREIGN CAMOUFLAGE UNIFORMS: WWW.WESTERNSURVIVAL.COM

Rebel against the Internet empires (MSN/AOL/Earthlink). http://www.elirion.net (888) 261-9995.

THE SPECIAL SCIENCE FICTION COMBINATION FREE AD OFFER

PLACE A CLASSIFIED AD IN OUR NEXT TWO ISSUES AND RECEIVE A THIRD AD FREE!

Your ad will reach a combined audience of 100,000 readers in our outstanding publications—**Analog and Asimov's** science fiction magazines.

Call today for a new rate card.

DELL MAGAZINES CLASSIFIED DEPARTMENT
475 Park Avenue South, 11th Floor, NY, NY 10016
Call: (212) 686-7188 ● Fax: (212) 686-7414
Email: classifiedads@dellmagazines.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT ISSUE

AUGUST ISSUE

Bestselling author **William Barton** returns with our lead story for August, taking us to a distant high-tech future where robots and cyborgs of all sorts are created to serve the every need of a decadent overclass of bored and rich near-immortal humans, and sweeps us along a on a tour of the Utopian (sort of) Earth that demonstrates chillingly what it would be like to labor under "The Gods of a Lesser Creation." This is a compelling and powerful story that you won't soon forget. Don't miss it!

ALSO IN AUGUST

Hugo-winner **Kristine Kathryn Rusch** shows us the unexpected consequences of "Collateral Damage" on a near-future society; **R. Neube** takes us to a war-torn future to explain that he was just "Following Orders"; new writer **Jack Skillingstead** paints a vivid portrait of a man on board a generation ship in deep space who thinks that he's willing to do anything to avoid a "Transplant" (until his actions start shaking the ship apart, anyway!); **Richard Parks** serves up a good old-fashioned ghost story, complete with haunted mansions and "A Hint of Jasmine"; **Meredith Simmons** makes an incisive *Asimov's* debut with a peek at a world where all authority is deferred—perhaps unwisely—to "The Guardian"; World Fantasy Award-winner **Tanith Lee**, one of today's most respected fantasists, returns after too-long an absence with a change of pace, whisking us to the bleak Lunar landscapes of the Moon for an eerie encounter with a "Moon Wolf"; new writer **Matthew Jarpe** returns to ladle out some "Chicken Soup for Mars and Venus" with a real kick—and a couple of laser-gun battles—to it; and veteran writer **Kit Reed** nails signs up in the neighborhood advertising a "Yard Sale" that you might actually want to be sure to *miss*.

EXCITING FEATURES

Robert Silverberg's "Reflections" column pokes curiously at some "Trilobites"; and **Paul Di Filippo** brings us "On Books"; plus an array of cartoons, poems, and other features. Look for our August issue on sale at your newsstand on June 29, 2004. Or subscribe today and be sure to miss none of the fantastic stuff we have coming up for you this year (you can also subscribe to *Asimov's* online, including downloadable forms for your PDA, by going to our website, *www.asimovs.com*).

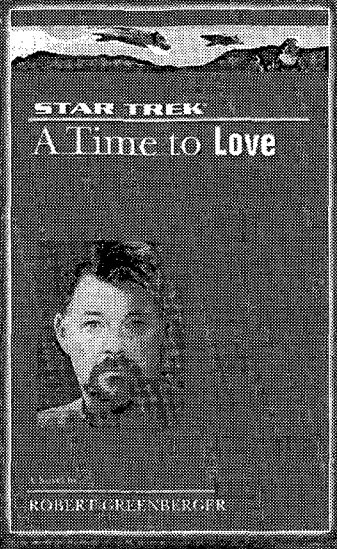
COMING SOON

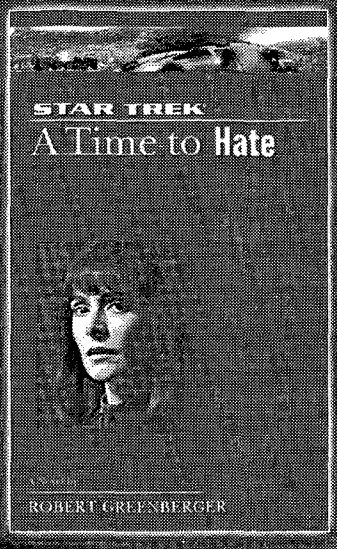
new stories by **Charles Stross**, **Michael Swanwick**, **Maureen F. McHugh**, **William Sanders**, **William Barton**, **Robert Reed**, **Mary Rosenblum**, **Paul Melko**, **Neal Asher**, **David D. Levine**, **David Moles**, **Paolo Bacigalupi**, and many others!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To save a world, a father and son must come to terms with their past.

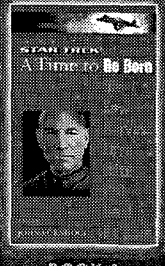
The epic saga continues...



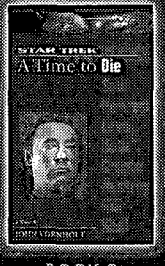


When Commander Riker discovers his estranged father may be at the heart of a crisis between two alien cultures, his relationship with his father—and his future with Starfleet—could be at stake.

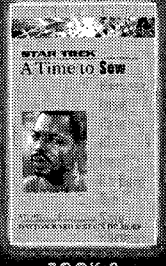
Don't miss the previous books in the series:



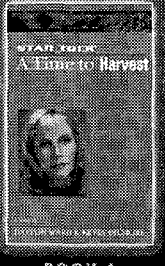
BOOK 1



BOOK 2



BOOK 3



BOOK 4

Visit www.simonsays.com/st and www.startrek.com.

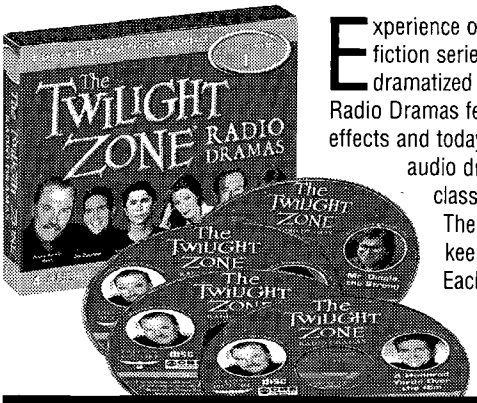
STAR TREK BOOKS
Published by Pocket Books
A Division of Simon & Schuster
A VIACOM COMPANY

Available wherever books are sold.
Also available as eBooks

™, ®, & © 2004 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. STAR TREK and related marks are trademarks of Paramount Pictures. Pocket Books Authorized User.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Twilight Zone® Radio Dramas



Experience one of television's greatest science-fiction series, The Twilight Zone® - fully dramatized for AUDIO! The Twilight Zone® Radio Dramas feature a full cast, music and sound effects and today's biggest celebrities in modern audio dramas of creator Rod Serling's classic scripts. Hosted by Stacy Keach, The Twilight Zone® Radio Dramas will keep you glued to the edge of your seat. Each collection features 4 stereo recordings totalling 3.5 hours.

Regular Price $27.99 each

Buy One Collection, Take $5.00 off!
Buy Two or more, Take $12.00 off your total!

COLLECTION 1

"A Hundred Yards Over the Rim"
starring Jim Caviezel
"The Lateness of the Hour"
starring Jane Seymour
"A Kind of Stopwatch"
starring Lou Diamond Phillips
"Mr. Dingle, the Strong"
starring Tim Kazurinsky

4000 Collection 1 (Cassette)
4001 Collection 1 (CD)

COLLECTION 2

"The Thirty-Fathom Grave"
starring Blair Underwood
"The Man In the Bottle"
starring Ed Begley, Jr.
"The After Hours"
starring Kim Fields
"Night of the Meek"
starring Chris McDonald

4002 Collection 2 (Cassette)
4003 Collection 2 (CD)

COLLECTION 3

"I Am the Night - Color Me Black"
starring John Ratzenberger
"A Stop At Willoughby"
starring Chelcie Ross
"Cavender Is Coming"
starring Andrea Evans
"Escape Clause"
starring Mike Starr

4004 Collection 3 (Cassette)
4005 Collection 3 (CD)

COLLECTION 4

"The Passersby"
starring Morgan Brittany
"The Rip Van Winkle Caper"
starring Tim Kazurinsky
"Four O'Clock"
starring Stan Freberg
"The Monsters Are Due On Maple Street"
starring Frank John Hughes

4006 Collection 4 (Cassette)
4007 Collection 4 (CD)

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-866-989-9663
Visit our website at www.twilightzoneradio.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED